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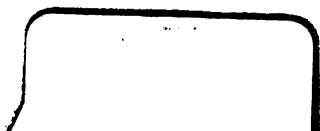
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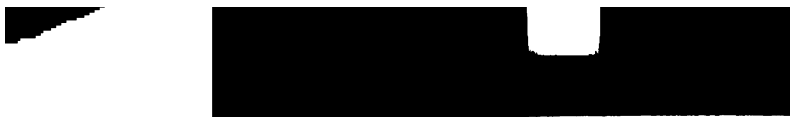
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THE

HOUSE IN BALFOUR-STREET.

BY

CHARLES DIMITRY, Esq.

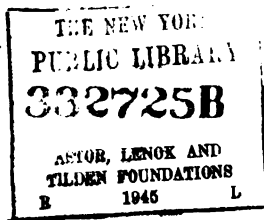
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THE HOUSE IN BALFOUR-STREET.

CHAPTER I.

“THE HOUSE IN BALFOUR-STREET” RECEIVES A NEW
TENANT.

THE manner in which this chapter has taken the liberty of introducing itself conveys four self-evident facts to the reader's mind: First, that there is question of a house; second, that this house is situated on a street; third, that there is question, again, of a city, town, or village; and fourth, that this house so situated on a street, in a city, town, or village, contains already at least one tenant. These propositions being established beyond cavil, it becomes the province of this historian to say—commencing, as is proper, with the locality—that the town wherein the events hereinafter set forth find their field of action is known as Alderley and is situated in England, not many miles from London, but sufficiently distant to be entirely removed from the noise and bustle of that city by day, and yet not far enough to be out of sight of the lurid glare in the heavens that betokens its presence after dark. Having, as it were, attained to the consummation of this knowledge, and having, further, so far taken advantage of the reader's good-nature as to have cajoled him or her into the town, he will accompany him or her, permission being granted, along Balfour-street, until together they stand, in the dusk

of a misty October night, before the house which forms the first fact involved in this chapter's title.

The house is one that has seen its best days. It belongs to a style of architecture which went out of fashion years and years ago, and it needs but a single glance to show that the hands that built it have long since returned to their original dust. The roofs are high and peaked; the windows are deep-set and of a retiring look; the entrance is surmounted with an arch, the centre figure of which is a lion's head with an angry snarl upon it, and which seems to threaten the passer-by. In the daytime, when all things are clearer, many of the attributes of the house which are unnoticed in the darkness come out and make themselves apparent. Then it is seen that there is a decrepit look about the brick and mortar of which the house is composed, the bricks having gaps and crevices between them, and the mortar dropping out silently into little heaps upon the casing of the windows, on the arch of the door-way, and on the lion's head above the entrance. This dusty feature gives to it a sepulchral look and an appearance of extreme old age mingled with melancholy, and causes strangers in the town and countrymen coming in with their wares to pass remarks about it, to the effect that it looks like a haunted house, like a house in which a murder or suicide had been committed—like, in fine, a house in which they would not choose to live if they could avoid it. These features are features of the daytime only, however, and when night comes on they wrap themselves in the mantle of obscurity and are seen no more, leaving the old house to a woe-be-gone appearance of staring at its fellow over the way with a feeble affectation of keeping up appearances in defiance of common sense.

There is this peculiarity about the house, furthermore—which tends to add to that sepulchral look which distin-

guishes it—that the echoes hereabout are, either in the fancy of the townspeople, or in reality, louder and clearer than elsewhere. It is a common thing, at a late hour on a quiet night, to hear the footsteps of the passer-by ringing more sharply when he passes it than they did a little above it or a little below it. In the minds of some this is accounted for on the supposition that there is an excavation under the pavement in front of it; in the minds of others—and these are the majority of those who have given thought to the subject—these echoes arise from the necessity of the case and are a part of the mysteries that linger about the place. And yet, with all this marvel about the house, and with all the speculations to which it gives birth, there is no legend attached to its history.

It is not on record anywhere that anybody has ever been slain within its ghostly rooms, or that the blood of a suicide has ever spotted its stained walls. Men and women have been born in it and have died in it, it is true; but there is no story attached to these births and deaths. There are traditions among the old citizens of the town in regard to the families that have at various times inhabited it; but these traditions point to nothing more ominous than that one family was remarkable for having a very pretty daughter who married in due course of time and removed to another part of the country; and that another family which once lived there had had a very wild son who was the terror of the other boys of Alderley. The last—and for aught the people knew the present—owner of the house had left it twenty years before and had gone away to a distant county, leaving it with all the furniture in it, and had only come at intervals to look after it and to have it aired and swept; which being done he would go away again, and it would be left fastened up as before, to grow more and more dusty with the weight of years added to neglect. But

after a while he ceased to come, and rumor had it that he had died.

For the last year or more the old house had had an occupant, some said an agent of the succeeding proprietor. And as this brings us to the fourth fact declared by this chapter's title, we will revert to the misty October night upon which the house receives another tenant.

In addition to its misty condition this October night was cold and chilly. In addition to which, again, it was a drizzly night, and, therefore, it is hardly necessary to say, wet. There was no desire on the part of the people of the town to be out in the streets, and consequently these latter were nearly deserted. There were lights in the back rooms of shops and in the windows of the houses, and these relieved the town of a little of the depression caused by the weather. In the sitting-room of the Knight and Dragon inn there was also a light, and likewise a cheerful company, and the glow from the fire came out into the street through the windows and lit up with a pleasant hue the face of the chubby St. George, painted upon a sign, doing successful battle with a fiery dragon.

But it is not to be supposed that the whole of Alderley was thus given over to silence and solitude. At the railway station there was moving about and bustling of baggage men and porters, for the six o'clock train from London was due. The lights from the lamps flared dimly upon the dozen or so loiterers, cabmen, and employees of the railroad who lingered around the station; and, as the giant minute-hand of the station-clock slowly moved on its revolving course, some of these went away, while the rest, who were forced by duty to remain, retired into a corner and waited for the time when the welcome whistle of the locomotive should indicate the approach of the train.

Apart from the crowd, which, drowsy with waiting, had

mostly yielded to sleep, an old man walked back and forth, his hands clasped behind him and his head bent upon his breast. Up and down the covered way, as the minutes passed, he walked, his footsteps keeping monotonous time to the rain dripping from the gables upon the pavement. At intervals, when his steps would lead him under one of the lamps, he would look at his watch for a moment, to replace it thereafter in its fob, and to recommence his walk with a weary gesture of impatience. When at last in the distance came the sound of the approaching train he neared the edge of the platform and peered earnestly in the direction from which the cars were to come. In a little while the rattle of the cars was nearer, the mist was lighted up with a rapidly increasing glare, and the locomotive came dashing through the darkness with its signal-light flaring like a gigantic eye. As the passengers commenced to leave the train and pass under the lamp the man approached and looked into each face. He stood there with an uncertain expression upon his countenance after the last passenger had left him. When the scene was deserted by all save the porters and baggage-men, he went along the carriages and peered into the windows. The uncertain expression deepened upon him as he turned away, disappointed, from this search. Then looking around carefully, as if to make sure that no passenger from the train yet lingered, he turned and walked rapidly toward the steps leading from the platform to the street. But as he reached these he halted; for, from the car nearest him, he heard a loud, angry, authoritative voice ring out on the night.

“Put it down, I say,” cried the voice. “Who told you to take it? Is a man’s luggage his own?” These words were simple enough in themselves, although the voice was that of an angry man; but the face of the man who had been waiting paled a little as he heard them.

Again upon the night came the voice. "Death and fury! For what do you take me?" Then there was a noise as of a violent scuffle in the car, which was followed, a moment after, by the appearance of one of the porters reeling from the platform of the coach into the middle of the little gathering on the flooring of the station. The man who had looked into the faces of the passengers crept up and waited for what was to follow. What was to follow came in the shape of a man of powerful frame and lofty stature, who sprang with the agility of a cat from the car and glared with an angry look upon the porter who had preceded him.

"Is a man's luggage his own?" he repeated. "Who told you to take it?"

"Nobody," said the porter, sullenly, rubbing his arm and looking askance into his assailant's face. The stranger seemed about to strike him. He held in his left hand a light valise—the cause of the trouble—and in his right a small walking-cane, which was half raised. He did not strike him, however. "Beware how you trifle with me," he said. "No man shall trifle with me."

As he spoke these words he looked around defiantly upon the crowd which was standing about him. Whatever might have been their opinion of his conduct, no one seemed inclined to question his authority. The brute strength his muscular frame indicated deterred them from the expression of any opinion, and the passion that burned in his eye awed them. As he stood there, the centre of those who gazed upon him in silence, he presented a fearful picture of one whose untrained nature and uncontrolled passions might be made the channel for persecutions of his fellows. As he stood there, with the light from the flickering lamp falling upon him, a mass of muscles and sinews, a face that reflected the audacity of an arrogant mind, it is not strange that the others looking at him should have

been terrified into silence. His age was not above thirty; but a scar upon his cheek and the evident traces of dissipation gave a false air of age to him. His face was marked with lines, either of care or of riotous living. Withal, a handsome man, and precise in his dress, which was of a semi-military cut. He wore a long, drooping moustache, and his hair was curled with an effeminate care. In his eye, although now passionate in its look, there lurked an expression of the independent spirit that was natural to him.

Thus, then, appeared the man who, on that October night, stood the centre of those who loitered around the Alderley depot, but not of them. And this, too, was the new tenant of the house in Balfour-street.

The porter whom he had thrust from the car had risen to his feet with a concealed scowl upon his face and was making off in the darkness, when the stranger's voice, ordering him to halt, caused him to turn with a sullen protest.

"You're a bigger man than I am. I'd be a child in your hands, and you know it. What do you want with me now?"

"I want to tell you you must be more careful in future. I want to tell you not to make off with a gentleman's luggage again until you get his permission. See here! I am not a hard man when men do what is right by me; but"—and here his frown came back to him—"I am a dangerous man when I am trifled with. Have you any objection to drinking my health to-night?"

"Well—no," said the porter, a little reluctantly. "I suppose it's all square now. I ain't one to bear a grudge when a thing's made up and over."

"Then take this guinea and go with your friends and drink my health." He threw him the money as he spoke, and when the porter wished to thank him he interrupted

him and said: "There! go now. I pushed you out of the carriage because you made me angry. We are quits now."

During this scene the old man who had scrutinized the passengers emerging from the train advanced toward the stranger, who now stood alone with his valise in his hand, the crowd having moved away, and who turned at the sound of footsteps. For the first time his eye fell upon the man who had been waiting. There was the same timid look upon the latter's face as he said: "Welcome home, Arthur."

The stranger made no answer to this salutation, except to say: "Ha, Blacker! you are here, are you? How do you do? Take this sack and follow me. You can attend to the rest of the luggage to-morrow." He strode away as he spoke, and the old man, taking his valise, went after him in the darkness.

Out of the station-house and into the street, with the mist gathering them to itself, these two, so strangely mated, walked. There was an appearance of commanding about the stranger and an appearance of obeying about the old man. This appearance of commanding and obeying appeared natural to the two, and the latter trudged after his companion with a patient fidelity that seemed to bespeak an old habit of obedience. The frown was still on the stranger's face when he turned and said: "Is the house ready for me? Have you everything prepared as I wrote you?"

"Everything in the house is as you left it, Arthur. The house is dustier, though, than when you went away."

"Well, can you expect otherwise? The house was dusty enough twenty years ago. The house is older and we are older. Dust comes with decay, and decay comes with age." Then he seemed to bethink himself of a certain tone in which the older man had spoken, for he said, after

a little pause: "But you talk with a whimper, Blacker. What is the matter with you? You used to be a bold enough man in your day for some things. Of what are you afraid?"

"Nothing, Arthur, except—"

"Pshaw, man! You haven't become virtuous during my absence? Walk faster! I am nearly frozen. I hope you have a fire ready?" The fire was ready, Blacker said. And then they fell into silence and walked on.

Through the dark streets they trudged until they stood before the lion's head above the entrance to the house in Balfour-street. Then the man addressed as Blacker took a key from his pocket and turned it in the lock of the curiously-carved door. When he tried to force the door open it resisted his efforts. The stranger pushed him away and tried it himself. He shook it until it opened.

"It has always been so, lately," said the old man apologetically. "I will have the hinges oiled to-morrow."

In shaking the door, something had fallen upon the stranger's shoulder and arm and hand—something of a fine texture, of a white color, and almost imperceptible in the darkness. The stranger's sharp eye detected it, however. Holding out his arm and examining it, he said to his companion: "What the devil is this?"

"Dust."

"Dust? Dust from where?"

"Dust from the arch above the door. Dust from the windows. Dust from the crevices in the bricks. Dust from everywhere."

Still inspecting it, the stranger said: "If I were a superstitious man I might think strangely of this—eh, Blacker?"

"I did not like to mention it, Arthur," said the old man, submissively; "but I was thinking that perhaps you would find more comfortable lodgings at the hotel down the street here."

"No! no hotel for me! No place in which men gather to stare a man out of countenance! No running about of prying servants and watching of idle guests to torture *me* with their impertinent curiosity! As long as I remain in Alderley, I will stay here—here where I was born. And if any man wish to find me, let him come here to seek me!" And then he struck the door heavily, causing the dust to fall upon him again and to whiten his coat like a thin fall of snow. When he had struck the door in this way, he looked up at the house and spoke again. There was an unusual softness in his voice as he said, "How familiar the old house looks, Blacker! There is the window of the room in which I was born." He was looking at a window from which a dull light struggled out into the mist.

Blacker answered in a more cheerful tone than he had yet used. "I had a fire made there for you. I thought you would prefer that room to the others."

"You are right, Blacker. I do. But let us enter. I must get to the fire." Saying which, they went in and shut the door after them.

The passage in which they stood was close and dark. When Blacker, drawing from his pocket a wax match, struck a light, they went to the stairway and commenced to ascend it. It was rusty with years of unuse and creaked under their footsteps. The papering on the wall on either side of it was stained in the places where the moisture had set its seal for years; and there was a musty smell about the old house, as though the air that was in it then had been imprisoned there since that time, long before, of which the stranger had spoken—the time when he was born.

At the end of the passage above they came to a door—the door of the room from which the light shone into the street. The stranger opened it and went in. He looked around the room for a few moments—at the bed spread

with its snowy quilt, at the portrait of his dead mother above the mantelpiece, at the old-fashioned furniture ranged around the walls with grim precision.

"And this is home!" he said bitterly. Then he drew a large armchair up to the fire and sat himself down in it. He gazed into the flames, and as he gazed he seemed to forget the patient figure standing by the door. After a while his stern, hard face—made sterner and harder by the scar upon it—softened by degrees, and his gaze wandered from the fire to his mother's portrait—the portrait of a woman in the prime of life with a thoughtful brow. He looked until the lines on his brow wore away one by one, for a vision of his days of boyhood came back to him—days when he had sat at his mother's knee and had looked up into her living face as he now looked at her pictured lineaments. A strange huskiness was in his voice when he broke the silence.

"She was a good mother to me, Blacker," he said. "She was worthy of a better son than I ever was. When I sit here to-night and think of the tears I have caused her to shed, I feel how wrong and undutiful I was not to have obeyed her in her slightest wish—not to have loved her as she should have been loved. I know now, what I did not know, or would not know then, that she was my only friend. I know that now, because I have suffered every wrong that a man could suffer and have found nobody to care for me—nobody to cheer me—nobody to sympathize with me!"

The figure at the threshold closed the door softly as his companion spoke and advanced to the fireplace. He, too, looked into the fire as he answered—

"She was indeed a good lady, Arthur. Everybody loved Mrs. Tyrrel."

As he spoke these last words there was a return of the

stranger's passionate manner. "Not that name!" he said, fiercely. "Not that name, Blacker, I charge you!" He rose from the chair on which he had been sitting and paced the room with rapid strides. Then pausing suddenly before his companion, he laid his hand heavily upon his shoulder.

"Mark me!" he said, abruptly; "when I was cashiered for violating the regulations of the service, as they called it, I felt that I no longer possessed a right to the name my mother bore and which my father had given me. Let it be dead henceforth between us. Blot it from your memory as though it had never existed and listen to what I tell you now!" The fear came back to the old man and he shrank from the hand that pressed upon his shoulder.

"If men ask you who I am—as they may—tell them I am Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service. If they should ask you to what regiment I belonged, tell them you do not know—that I am not in the habit of speaking of my affairs. If they should ask you what connection exists between us, you will tell them I am on a visit to you. And if they should ask you how long I purpose remaining, and what resources I have, or any other question that idlers or gossips may put, refer them to me. Do you understand what I have told you, and can you remember it?"

"I understand you and I shall remember it. You do not wish your name to be known? You have a right to demand my silence and I shall accord it."

He had moved away from the old man and was again walking hastily back and forth. Then he went on speaking, partly to himself and partly to his companion.

"I do not wish it to be known that the man who has come back here with a hundred sins upon his head is what remains of the innocent boy who went away from this place twenty years ago. Men have forgotten that that boy ever

lived. When my mother died and left me in your charge she thought my future was assured—that he who had served her faithfully would deal fairly with her orphan son. But I do not upbraid *you*. If I have committed errors in my life; if I have followed the paths of vice and wrong; if I have forgotten the teachings of that blessed angel in heaven who mourns over what is left of her on earth; I reproach no man for what I am to-day. If you have been part and parcel of my sins it is because I continued the wrong you had commenced!”

The old man leaned his head upon the mantelpiece and tears trickled through his clasped fingers. “Arthur,” he said, “in coming back here, you have not come with those sinful thoughts that once worked so much sorrow? Think, Arthur, of all the years of waiting and hoping I have undergone. Think of what might have been and of what is.”

“We can’t talk of that now, Blacker,” the stranger said, hoarsely. “The contingency which, in a wild moment, I fancied might occur, has come to pass at last in Bertha’s marriage. If I had to live my life over again I would act differently; but, as it is done, I must reap the benefit.”

“What benefit, Arthur?”

“Never mind what benefit! Don’t question me! I say to you now, that I must have influence and power to crush my enemies. Her husband has both and he shall give them both!” Still walking backward and forward, the frown on his face growing darker and darker. Still speaking partly to himself and partly to the old man.

“Knowing me as you do; having known me as I was, and seeing me as I am now; do you believe I could ever forget or forgive? Have I ever turned both cheeks to the smiter’s hand and tamely submitted to wrong? And when I am down, *down*, with the world’s foot upon my neck, think you I will not struggle, and bite, and strike

back until I get even with those who have put me in the dust?" No answer from the old man still leaning upon the mantelpiece.

"Had men treated me fairly," continued the stranger, growing more impetuous with his words, "this terrible fate of being always down would not, perhaps, have followed me. Had I been let alone—I have never asked more and that is not much to ask—I might have stood as high as the best of them. But it seemed that this was not to be. When I most avoided quarrel and anger then was it that I was most set upon; and when I was struck, I struck back!"

"But with all that, Arthur, we can still do Bertha justice, and not approach her or her husband with threats. The knowledge that is hidden from her now must come sooner or later. It may make her miserable, but she *must* know it. Perhaps she would be reconciled to it if she were told of it gently."

The stranger paused in his walk to say, scornfully, "You speak of justice! What justice could *you* do her—what amends could *you* make her! Think you that she, or her husband, would suffer what she, or he, or their friends would call the attempt at imposition of an impostor? I do not refer so particularly to her, but I speak of *him*. If she be like the rest of her circle she might join them to save herself the disgrace; but *he* would thrust you from the door, I know, and would invoke the law against you! But when I shall go to him with proofs—when I shall go with the alternative of exposure on the one hand—because it would be exposure for *him*—or a quiet yielding on the other, and when I shall demand from him the influence I need, he will yield, not to his feelings, but to the necessity that shall bind him. The end will be the same, and I will come out of the mire that surrounds me now!"

"I do not know *his* nature, but hers is too good for that. Far, far too good for that."

During Blacker's words his companion had resumed his seat before the fire. He was twirling his moustache impatiently and the frown that was natural to him still rested upon his brow. When Blacker ceased speaking, he pointed to a chair. "Sit down there," he said, "and tell me all about it—about the marriage, I mean."

Sitting there, the two men looked into each other's face. It was the fable of the wolf and the lamb. One all humility and submissiveness; the other all arrogance and recklessness. The one, the face of a man made wicked by bad counsel and weakness; the other, the face of a man wicked through unrestrained passions. Before the old man had spoken the stranger said, "When I saw her marriage mentioned in the papers I had no clue as to where he—her husband, I mean—first met her. Where was it, and how?"

"Mrs. Archibald had gone down with Bertha to the seaside to pass the summer season at her residence in the neighborhood of Brighton. During their stay there Mr. Arncliffe came to the place in his yacht. He met Bertha at a ball, and so commenced their acquaintance." The stranger had listened intently. When the old man had got thus far he nodded and said, "Go on."

"From the night on which he made Bertha's acquaintance at the ball he continued to visit her at Mrs. Archibald's. The gossip of the place soon said that they were to be married. I did not know how true this was, but I frequently saw them together in the public places. When the season drew to a close Mr. Arncliffe went with them to Westmoreland."

"And there they were married?"

"Soon after—a month after—Mr. Arncliffe married Bertha."

The new tenant of the house in Balfour-street here fixed himself easily in his chair, and, stretching himself to his full length, leaned his head upon his right hand, whilst with his left he drew a cigar from his pocket."

"Give me a light, Blacker," he said.

When Blacker had given the light, he held it to his cigar and puffed away leisurely.

"That was exactly what we both desired, eh, Blacker?" he said after a while; "that she should marry a gentleman."

"I am glad she has married as she has done. If her life, hereafter, is to be a happy one, I feel justified in conduct which, otherwise, could have no justification."

The new tenant did not seem to be influenced by any consideration as virtuous as that of the old man's; for, as he looked through the smoke at his companion, his face wore a business look, and when he next spoke his question was of a business character.

"When I wrote to you from Paris," he said, "to discover what you could in regard to Mr. Arncliffe's fortune, did you do as I directed? I judged him to be rich and influential from what I had read in the papers concerning the marriage; but what did you learn?"

"Nothing but what I knew before. He has a great fortune and is influential."

"Good! Connected with Government, I believe?"

"Connected with Government."

"In what way?"

"Member of Parliament for North Sudley."

"Good again. The closer his connection with Government, the better for me. It could not have turned out better."

The old man gazed at his companion as if he would read in his face that secret he was keeping from him. But he might as well have sought to draw knowledge of the centuries from the stony face of Sphinx in its surrounding

sands. For through the smoke that curled about his head the stranger stared abstractedly into the fire. From his face to the fire, in his turn, the old man's look wandered. The fear that had weighed heavily upon his mind when he first knew that the man who sat before him was about to return to England; the fear that had possessed him when he met him, on his return, at the railway station that night; the old fear that had haunted him for so many years came back to him with renewed strength, and he prayed within himself that she whom he called "Bertha" might be spared the persecutions of the reckless man who had returned to his native land as he had left it, passionate and cruel in his nature and filled with evil thoughts. For a long time there was silence between the two men. The new tenant smoked his cigar in a reverie until the fire, burning his finger, warned him that it was time to desist. Then he rose from his chair and walked to the window. The mist was still abroad and the houses of the town loomed vaguely through it. As he stood there, looking into the quiet street, the eyes of the older man rested upon him and once again he sought to propitiate his companion.

"We will not take advantage of her prosperity," he said, "to benefit ourselves? We will rather let her live in her present ignorance, will we not, Arthur?" Although he said "we," he meant "you;" although saying "ourselves," he meant "yourself." His companion felt this, for he turned and answered impatiently. "I come back here from Paris—and you know it, for I have told you of it—a ruined man," he said. "I do not mean as regards fortune only; I could dispense with that. If I could bring myself to sell this house—the remnant of my inheritance, the last tie that binds me to the past—I would be above want. But I have other uses for this house, and old as it is, while I live, no stranger's foot shall cross it as master.

If Mrs. Arncliffe had married in what might have been her own sphere, and if she could not have been of use to me, I would never have returned to England and would never have approached her upon the subject that has brought me here. But I must speak to her; I do not say to threaten; and through her I must command that influence which rests with her husband to exert. As she has married wealth and position, why should she not assist me? If, when she shall know who I am, and the demand that I shall make upon her, she should spurn me, let her look to it!" His nature burst forth fiercely, and he struck the sill of the window near which he was standing. "Let her and her husband look to it!" he repeated. In the storm of passion which his own evil thoughts had evoked what measure of evil lurked against the happiness of the woman whom he called "Mrs. Arncliffe," and of whom the old man spoke as "Bertha"? And under what protecting roof did she dream at that hour, and was her sleep broken by any thought of him who sat by the fire on that October night and plotted against her, with the eyes of his dead mother resting on him from the portrait on the wall?

The fire waned with the waning night, and the ghastly gray of the coming dawn joined a new pallor to the mist without as the ashen morning looked into the window of the room in which the two men sat and talked, with the candle flaring upon them and giving to their faces a sickly yellow hue. The dull noise of the lumbering market-carts fell upon their ears from the streets of the awakening town before the older man rose to go. Standing in the doorway, he spoke to the stranger.

"Are there any special orders you would wish to give, Arthur?" he asked.

"None but these: I wish to be alone in this house. I want no tramping around me of idlers, whether in the

shape of servants or visitors. Make what arrangements you please to secure this end—only let it be so. That is all. Good-night.”

Blacker still lingered irresolutely at the door.

“If you should speak about me to Bertha,” he said in his submissive way, “be merciful in what you say. Tell her that a lifetime of sorrow has brought repentance with it. It will perhaps lead her to forgive me.”

He waited a little while for an answer, but none came. And then, closing the door behind him, he groped along the dark passage until he reached his own room.

What time, above the ashes of the almost extinguished fire the new tenant of the house in Balfour-street sat in solitary self-communion. And across his mind swept the panorama of his life, until his mental vision fastened upon one picture that seared his brain with its crimson hues—the one monstrous act of his life that had put him beyond the pale of the laws. A long train of thought, indeed, which ended with this conclusion—

“She *shall* save me. If influence can do it, I *will* be a man again.”

CHAPTER II.

SOCIETY BESIEGES FRAMLEIGH-PLACE.

IN returning to England with the intention (as expressed to Blacker on the night of his arrival) of availing himself of Mrs. Arncliffe's influence, through her marriage, in order to advance his purposes—whatever those purposes may have been—Captain Vernon had thoughtfully provided himself beforehand with the means of attaining, unquestioned, the presence of the wife of Mr. Philip Arncliffe. A gambling acquaintance in Paris—a prop of a noble English house gone to ruin over cards—a witling whose face was familiar in the drawing-rooms of the select, and who made up for lack of personal merit, and covered the shame and recklessness of a dissolute life, in the possession of a name that was not the least in the book of the peerage,—from this source had Captain Vernon, under his assumed name, in a way peculiar to himself, secured letters of introduction which were all-sufficient.

Of the letters in his possession, Captain Vernon chose to avail himself of one only. This letter, addressed to a gentleman residing in the neighborhood of Alderley, Sir John Eden by name, a frank, open-hearted, unsuspecting man, was duly presented by the bearer with the natural result that the acquaintance thus offered was accepted. It was not necessary, it is true, that Captain Vernon, in order to accomplish his purpose, should restrict himself to the usages of society in crossing the threshold of Framleigh-Place. He might have crossed it as a stranger who wished to speak

with its mistress; but he had made his resolve, that in enrolling himself in the number of those who, without question, were admitted to the hospitalities of Mr. Arncliffe's house, he would take his rank, legitimately, among the guests whom he might find there. A strange resolution, perhaps, under the circumstances; but it was in keeping with the strange, absolute, dogged nature of the man.

The day subsequent to his arrival at Alderley had been devoted to the presentation of his letter of introduction to Sir John Eden. In that interview his host had offered his friendly aid in making his stay in Alderley agreeable. By a delicate conversational manœuvre Captain Vernion had brought Sir John to propose that which he most desired—namely, that he should be presented at Mrs. Arncliffe's reception on the following day. With this understanding, the two men had parted, with an agreement that Sir John should call at the house in Balfour-street and accompany Captain Vernon to Framleigh.

It was at an hour when, under more favorable atmospheric circumstances, the sun would have been shining brightly in the heavens, that the front door of the house in Balfour-street opened to let in the welcome light of day, dismal as it was. The clock had struck eleven when it opened and closed again with a jar which shook the dust from the grinning lion's head surmounting its portals and admitted into the busy street Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, attired with exemplary care. Much of the sternness that gave a harsh expression to his face was wanting in it as he stood for a moment upon the lowest step, and his moustache fell with a more graceful droop over his mouth, and his hair fluttered in the slight wind that was abroad. Any one passing him that morning might have been pardoned for supposing that the stern, handsome man who stood in front of the old house was about to min-

gle in ladies' society, so scrupulous was he in his dress. He held in his hand a walking-cane, and as he looked up the street he tapped the tip of his glistening boot with a careless grace. Altogether, the new tenant, as he appeared in the morning, was quite a different man from the new tenant of the night before.

Still standing upon the step, he looked around him for a little while and then sauntered leisurely down the street. A few squares away he stopped at a large building from which protruded a sign whereon was painted the representation of a fiery horse attached to a frail vehicle, the former being driven by a reckless tiger who appeared to be undergoing a penance, and which made him aware that he had found that of which he was in search. He turned into the building and spoke to a heavy-built man who was superintending some operation connected with horses.

"Are you proprietor here?" he asked. The tone was not of the pleasantest, and the man looked up with a surly countenance; but the surly answer he was about to make was toned down to a more respectful response as he glanced at his questioner.

"Yes, sir. I am proprietor of these stables."

"Let me have a horse and carriage, then. Something stylish, you know." The man made a rough salutation and turned to the hostler to give directions. As he moved away, Captain Vernon said, carelessly: "Can you tell me how far it is to Framleigh-Place?"

The proprietor's manner became respectful immediately.

"About a mile out on the London road, sir," he answered.

"Thank you," said the Captain, as he twirled his moustache. As he had expected it would, his question had elevated him in the mind of the proprietor of the stables, for he heard him say to the hostler in a low tone, "That's

a genteel cove, Sanders. Get out the new brougham and put Black Dick to it."

Satisfied from this that his equipage would not appear to disadvantage among the others he would find at Framleigh-Place on his arrival there, the Captain, after telling the hostler he would return presently, lounged out as leisurely as he had gone in, and walked up and down in front of the stables. The lad who was to attend him came to him finally, touching his cap, and informed him that the carriage was in waiting. He walked briskly to where the vehicle stood, admired for a moment the blooded animal which had been designated as "Black Dick" by the proprietor, threw a crown to the groom in waiting, jumped into the brougham followed by the boy, and rapidly drove away.

The speed at which he drove the willing horse soon placed him beyond the town into the high road that led to London. Here he slackened the horse's pace and proceeded leisurely until he came in sight of Framleigh-Place. He was perfectly familiar with the locality, notwithstanding the question he had put to the proprietor of the stables. There was nothing of newness to him, therefore, in the great house with its flanking steps, its pillars and its portico. The park and its winding walks, the fountains and the statues rising from their pedestals, he also knew with an old knowledge. The rustling elm-trees, yellow and faded, were but portions of a picture that had been stamped upon his mind in his boyish days, and he drove past the porter's lodge, and beyond the massive posts at the gate, with a feeling which reproduced hours which had long seemed dead in his memory.

Captain Vernon drove for an hour or more before he turned and directed his course back to Alderley. The hour at which he was expecting Sir John Eden's arrival was ap-

proaching, and he hastened so as to be ready to receive him when he should call at the house in Balfour-street.

As he entered the town his new acquaintance drove up by another street, and they met with mutual compliments.

"I have been driving a short distance into the country, Sir John," remarked Captain Vernon. "I did not, however, allow my interest in the beautiful scenery to get the better of my recollection of your kindness. I thank you, sir, for your promptness."

The baronet bowed in acknowledgment of Captain Vernon's implied compliment.

"I await your pleasure, Captain Vernon," he replied. "Shall we now proceed to Framleigh?"

"I am ready to go, Sir John. As I passed the gate of the Park, I observed that the guests were already assembling."

"We shall be in good time, then. Let us start."

The road in the neighborhood of the gate and the broad carriage-drive that led up to the house were filled with the carriages which had brought Society to the performance of its customary devotions. It was one of the occasions wherein Society asserts itself most strongly that had thus brought it together. It was one of those days set apart by Mr. Philip Arncliffe, through Mrs. Philip Arncliffe, his wife—Mr. Philip Arncliffe himself being away in another part of the country, arranging with certain of his fellow-members on the proper method of sustaining Government in the ensuing legislative struggle, and leaving to Mrs. Philip Arncliffe the scarcely less laborious performance of entertaining his friends—wherein Society was to be afforded an opportunity of admiring the extensive domain of the owner of Framleigh, and the rare paintings and books and gorgeous furniture the house contained, in return for which opportunity it was expected of Society to take its departure

properly impressed with the magnificence of its entertainer. Very little caring for Mrs. Arncliffe, and mindful of what was expected of it, Society had come wearing its close-fitting mask, fruitful of smiles and expressions of affection and friendship for Mr. Arncliffe's representative, some from the country around, some all the way from London, and were now, as Captain Vernon drove up, ascending the flanking steps, or descending the same, like a colony of ants.

The baronet and Captain Vernon went up the steps arm in arm, Captain Vernon towering a head and shoulder above the company going up or coming down.

At the door they were met by a brilliantly arrayed servant who presented the general appearance of a Stately Martyr, and who, receiving their cards, handed them on to another splendid domestic, with a certain air about him as of being a Gorgeous Victim, who stood like a herald at the door of the drawing-room and who proclaimed their names in a distressed tone of voice as if suffering a penalty. Thus announced, although in the hum of voices their names had died out and had become inextricably mingled with other sounds, they entered the apartment wherein Mrs. Arncliffe received her guests. There was much well-bred confusion in the room, a great deal of complimentary language that meant nothing, loudly spoken, and a great deal of uncomplimentary language which meant a great deal, spoken in whispers. Whilst it was remarked, audibly, on all sides, how sweet Mrs. Arncliffe looked, and what excellent taste in dress Mrs. Arncliffe displayed, there seemed to be very little care in reality for Mrs. Arncliffe. Society enjoyed itself amazingly, however. Society had come, in obedience to the inexorable law that it never cares to question, to offer this recognition of Mrs. Arncliffe's claims, as wife of Mr. Philip Arncliffe, to be considered as part of itself. Therefore, it felt that it had done a proper and commendable action and

exhibited a due contentment over the result of its complacency.

Society was variously distributed in its method of indicating its satisfaction with itself. It might be seen, through the lace curtains, in a smaller apartment, indulging in a glass of wine and delicately fingering a slice of cake. It might be seen in the shape of venomous old women, perched like a large species of lean and hungry hawk upon the high gothic chairs which ranged the walls, chattering, and mumbling, and picking to pieces, with scarcely a less voracious appetite than the bird of prey which they resembled, the reputations of such of their dear sisters as came under their immediate inspection. It might be seen in the shape of insipid young men dawdling over the backs of chairs and whispering into the ears of artificial young women the same old trite stories which, as long as time shall last, will continue to be whispered by insipid young men into the ears of artificial young women. It might be seen in the shape of stiff old gentlemen with extraordinary amplitude of white waistcoat, who heated themselves unnecessarily in stout arguments with each other to the effect, on the one hand, that, what would become of the Landed Interests, sir, what would become of the vested Rights of Proprietors, if that bill of Dimple's were not crushed by an indignant majority? and, on the other, that, my dear sir, it is absolutely necessary for the preservation of Magna Charta, which, you will allow, involves the preservation of the Liberties of the People, that Dimple should be sustained and Simple put down.

It was only after a long and arduous series of attempt that Captain Vernon and Sir John Eden, drifting helplessly about in the tide, could present themselves before Mrs. Arncliffe. When the special portion of Society which at that moment was engaged in its farewell expressions α

compliment had floated away and had left the channel clear, Sir John pressed forward in the vacancy, followed by the Captain, and saluted her. Her eyes were bent on the carpet as she acknowledged his profound bow, and she did not observe the form of the man whose arm was locked in his and who waited the introduction that was to follow.

"Mrs. Arncliffe, permit me to present to you Captain Horace Vernon," were the words that caused her to lift her eyes. As she did so, and as they rested for a moment upon the face of him who was bending before her, there surely should have been a power in their blue depths to disarm all thought of menace or persecution. And when her voice fell upon his ear there should have been an influence in its softness to shame his craft and to urge his heart to charity.

"Captain Vernon is welcome to Framleigh-Place. Any friend of yours is welcome, Sir John," she answered.

And then Society, urged on by Society behind it, asserted its claim, and Captain Vernon and his introducer lost their moorings and, with a parting bow, drifted away again into the tide. Thus drifting about, Captain Vernon and Sir John parted company, and the Captain took advantage of the opportunity to retire into the protecting shade of a window, where, as in a species of cove, he was freed from the current and could observe Mrs. Arncliffe more attentively. The throng still pressed around her—in-coming Society jostling against out-going Society—and in the middle of all she stood with her slight figure now obscured, now visible, as the guests parted to make way for newcomers. Captain Vernon's height, as he stood leaning against the moulding of the deep bay-window, rendered all that was passing in the room clear to him. His stern face—made sterner as he looked at those about her—wore a serious expression when his gaze was turned upon the woman who had so long occupied his speculations.

It was a slight, girlish figure of a woman upon which he looked. There was a weariness about her as she spoke and smiled to those around her which did not escape his eye. Whilst she spoke and smiled as if it were a pleasure to her to greet her guests, he saw the depression of mind and body—the self-sacrifice that crushed her own inmost feelings to please others.

Mr. Arncliffe was a great man among the other great men who composed Government. In his condition of being a portion of Government, it was necessary that he should maintain the dignity of his position and thereby, in so much, subserve the interests of Government. And hence, whilst he was attending to the safety of the nation away from Framleigh, Mrs. Arncliffe was doing her part of the great work (under instructions from the head of the house) by propitiating Society, and laughing with Society, and listening to what Society had to say by the hour together. Although Mr. Arncliffe could not, or would not, find time to leave, even for a day, the work of strengthening the hands of Government, some of his co-laborers in the tinkering department had somehow managed to run up from London, and were now briskly hopping about in the parlors of Framleigh, picking up such crumbs of conversational comfort as might be brought to bear favorably in the next Parliamentary debate, wherein it would be shown, my Lords and Gentlemen, how Government is again beset by what my honorable friend on the other side is pleased to call the demands of the People; how the Government is a patient, forbearing, and fatherly Government; and how, finally, Government is always right, and everybody who opposes it is always wrong.

If Captain Vernon, watching Society from his window, and observing Mrs. Arncliffe with a close scrutiny, had expected to find any awkwardness, any pride of bearing,

any new-found carelessness of speech in Philip Arncliffe's wife, he was disappointed. Had he expected to find in her a woman who would fight him with his own weapons, who would bring cunning to bear against cunning and obstinacy against obstinacy, he was again disappointed. A perplexed expression was in his eye as he gazed at her. Possibly there had come over his mind some change which he had not contemplated when speaking the night before of his purposes toward her. Whatever it might have been, it was a seeming change which caused him to screen himself still more in the shadow of the curtain and to follow her motions, to study her face, with a serious, thoughtful brow.

But after a while he roused himself, and went out into the throng with a look of forced pleasure and a laugh which did not seem quite natural. To one who knew the man, to one who might have listened to him when speaking in the house in Balfour-street, there would have been a suggestion of bitterness, of hatred of those whom he addressed, even in his most apparent cordiality, as he moved about the crowded rooms. But as, like the rest, he was but playing a part, he did not choose that Society should understand the truth. Hence, with a certain audacity that was natural to him, and with a peculiar power which he seemed to possess, he made acquaintances everywhere—Society having duly looked at him through its glasses and accepted him. He discovered Society's weak points and worked upon them. He argued with an old gentleman of an agricultural turn, over the sherry and the cake, on the farmers' interests. He spoke severely of the follies of the artificial young women, contrasting them with the modest and demure manners of a past day, when in conversation with the hawks perched upon the high gothic chairs. He joined the more jovially disposed gentlemen in friendly

visits to the punch-bowl, and inveighed against the whole system of intoxicating drinks with a Right Reverend Sir whom he had managed to corner during the afternoon. He was everything to everybody—always with that hidden trace of bitterness, always turning his thoughtful look to where the mistress of Framleigh stood.

Within a half-hour from the time he had commenced his circle of the rooms, he had received three distinct invitations from as many of the insipid young men to visit them at their shooting-boxes, and when the full hour had closed in he was engaged in escorting one of the hawks to her carriage. The latter stopped for a moment to bid her hostess good-bye.

Mrs. Arncliffe said to her, with a smile, as she approached leaning upon the Captain's arm, "Your ladyship is acquainted with Captain Vernon, I perceive."

"Quite well acquainted," returned the hawk. "I find Captain Vernon a charming companion. So sensible, I declare, of the follies of the foolish young women of the present day!"

"Ah?" said Mrs. Arncliffe.

Captain Vernon acknowledged his companion's compliment with a light laugh, and replied, "Truly, your ladyship does me too much honor!" Then he turned to Mrs. Arncliffe and addressed her, speaking in a changed voice.

"I hope to have Mrs. Arncliffe's forgiveness if I have appeared neglectful of her in the course of the morning; and I trust that the sacrifice she has made to-day for the sake of her friends has not fatigued her or operated unfavorably to her comfort?"

He spoke these words in a low tone and in a very deferential manner. Was he establishing an intimacy with her, and did she with a woman's tact perceive it? Else why did she again look upon the carpet at her feet, and why did

a slight color come upon her cheek which was not there before ?

A woman with less observation than Mrs. Arncliffe would have recognized the peculiar interest of the Captain's tone. And apart from whatever of personal attractions he may have possessed, a sense of her weakness compared with his strength struck upon her woman's nature with a grateful feeling as he bent in respectful homage before her. Perhaps, too, there was something in his voice which sounded strangely when contrasted in her mind with the careless tones Society was accustomed to use ; and so, in replying to his question, she answered with more feeling than she was in the habit of exhibiting in response to such commonplace words as had been addressed to her during the day.

"Captain Vernon is very kind," she said. "The task I have to undergo is indeed fatiguing." And then she looked up to meet in the gaze of his dark eyes an expression of sympathy and to feel to her self-reproach that the flush was deepening upon her cheek. But in that interval the hawk, ruffling her plumage for departure, croaked her farewell and hopped away, leading Captain Vernon along with her.

Left to herself for a moment, Mrs. Arncliffe followed with her eye their retreating figures. In that instant she reflected, for the first time, upon Captain Vernon's identity. Who was he ? He had come with Sir John Eden, and beyond that she knew nothing of his advent in the circle of her acquaintance ; and to that point her mind came back over and over again in her reverie. Through all the dragging interval consequent upon the departure of the day's visitors, to her heart and mind ceaselessly and persistently came the question, always unanswered with each recurrence : Who is Captain Vernon ? It was as if the mariner, new to

his vocation, sailing upon a placid sea, should mark in the clear horizon the cloud no larger than a man's hand and wonder at its unfamiliar meaning. And happy for him, as now her ignorance was for Mrs. Arncliffe, that he should sail and sail, if even for a little space, in peace, with no thought of the harvest of storm which was gathering for his undoing.

The rooms around her were gradually becoming empty. Society flitted about the great hall, inquiring for cloaks and mantles and badgering the Stately Martyr and the Gorgeous Victim with ceaseless demands for carriages, great-coats, hats and canes, until these two devoted children of misfortune, moving about in their flights from the hall to the carriage-way, resembled exhausted birds-of-paradise, with eyes dilated and with breath coming and going heavily. There were other calls upon Society's attention which must be obeyed. It had done its duty so far as Mr. Philip Arncliffe's wife was concerned, but that was no reason why my Lord in London (or his dinner) should be neglected; and it could not shut its eye to the fact that the festive lights were being prepared for it elsewhere by the wife of the Right Honorable This, and that her Grace of the Other was anxiously awaiting it at that dancing soir e to which, as in due form laid down and observed, it had been respectfully invited. And so, with hurried good-byes to the girlish little woman who now stood almost alone in the centre of the room, the front door of Framleigh shut upon the hawks, who had winged their way with the artificial young women tucked under their maternal wings, the insipid young men and the stout old gentlemen with the very extraordinary amplitude of waistcoat following duly after.

When the last guest had departed, and when the last carriage-wheel had ceased to sound upon the gravelled drive, Mrs. Arncliffe seated herself and leaned her head

wearily upon her hand. Her chair was in front of the great hall-door, which had been left ajar, and the dull, gray light of the misty day fell upon her as she sat.

Where were her thoughts straying? Were they with the hollow mockery of the morning's proceedings? Were they with Mr. Arncliffe, tinkering away in the West country, or—

A shadow had fallen upon her from the doorway and had shut out what little of cheerless light was in the hall. She looked up quickly, and upon the threshold beheld Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service. He was standing there with hat in hand, and with the respectful look which his face had worn when speaking to her at the time the hawk had led him away. Mrs. Arncliffe rose to receive him. There was a slight expression of wonder in her face, mingled with a sudden appearance of confusion.

Would not Captain Vernon be seated?

No; he thanked her. He begged pardon for the intrusion. He had called for his walking-stick, which he had forgotten. The door was open, and expecting to find the servant there he had not announced himself. He was under the impression that Mrs. Arncliffe had retired. Another day would do as well. He would not disturb Mrs. Arncliffe, who doubtless needed rest. He would again beg pardon, and would go.

All this with the same earnest sympathy in his voice he had shown when speaking to her for the first time. She was not looking up at him, but she could see him, in her mind, bending before her. She spoke to him again, still studying the flowers in the carpet. Would not Captain Vernon wait awhile? The servant would get the cane. She was not so weary but that she could see that done for a guest. Then she touched a bell upon the table and pointed with a smile to a chair.

She sat a little away from him, he in an armchair, she on the sofa. His eye had fallen upon a portrait on the wall—the portrait of a handsome young man, but of a haughty look about the eyes and the thin lips. His first remark had reference to this portrait. He looked at it closely. “A handsome face, madam,” he said. “Whose is it?”

“Mr. Arncliffe’s,” she replied, with a faint color upon her cheeks.

He was a younger man than Captain Vernon had thought. At least Captain Vernon expressed himself to that effect.

The flush deepened upon her cheek—again to her self-reproach. “It does not resemble Mr. Arncliffe as he appears to-day,” she answered. “It was taken in his days of early manhood. He had just left Oxford when it was painted. Mr. Arncliffe is no longer young, Captain Vernon.”

Ah? Captain Vernon was not aware of that.

The entrance of the Gorgeous Victim changed the topic of conversation. As he received his directions from Mrs. Arncliffe to produce the missing cane Captain Vernon twirled his moustache and looked at her intently. There was no sternness or harshness about his face as he looked at her now. There was nothing about it of the menacing expression it had worn when he had sat by the fire and had threatened her with a nameless ill. It was the face of one whose mind seemed to have gone back into the years and who may have been seeking to recall something that might have borne a resemblance to the beautiful features of the woman who sat before him. And the thought came into his mind, with a feeling of anger allied to it perhaps, that it was not strange that Mr. Arncliffe should have married her.

During the Victim’s brief absence a silence grew be-

tween Mrs. Arncliffe and her guest. He was thinking of her marriage with Mr. Arncliffe, and, strangely enough, still with that angry feeling connected with the thought; she was again debating within herself, as she looked into the coals, upon the subject of her guest's identity: and so the Victim's return with the cane found them with the silence still unbroken between them.

In returning the cane to its owner it was the Victim's misfortune to swing it, in a manner, pending that operation. A sudden wrath shot up into the Captain's eye, but he checked himself almost immediately. But in receiving the cane he fixed the Victim with the fellow to that angry look wherewith he had glared upon the porter at the railway station—a very dangerous look when taken in connection with his physical strength; and with a trembling in his limbs and a whitey hue breaking through his pink cheeks the Victim made away hurriedly. Mrs. Arncliffe observed the man's manner and its effect upon Captain Vernon.

"I must apologize to you, Captain Vernon," she said, "for whatever of disrespect may have appeared in the servant's manner. My servants are quite beyond my control. They have a wholesome fear of Mr. Arncliffe, but not, unfortunately, of me."

"But for your presence, Mrs. Arncliffe," he returned, "I should possibly have broken that rascal in two. But if he has ever lacked in respect for *you*, I would esteem it an honor, with your permission, to beat him into a knowledge of his station."

What with the earnestness of his tone, and what with that dark look in his eye, Mrs. Arncliffe hastened to say, "Oh, no, Captain; you quite mistake. His action arises from thoughtlessness. My servants never fail in proper respect for me. I only meant to say that I could not cause them to fear me, as Mr. Arncliffe seems to think they should do."

There was so much of antagonism between her appearance and any awakening of fear to be caused thereby; there was so much about her that might arouse another feeling in even the most obdurate heart, that Captain Vernon could only bow in his old deferential manner and look what he did not choose to speak.

"Mr. Arncliffe is absent from Framleigh, I believe?" was what he said when he next spoke.

"Yes. He represents a borough in one of the western counties and is absent on business connected with it."

"When will he return, madam?"

"It would be hard to say, Captain Vernon. I do not know that he has any fixed idea upon that subject. He may return to-morrow; he may not return before Christmas."

Then Captain Vernon fell into a little reverie. He might have been reverting to the subject of his conversation, the night before, with Blacker; or he might have been thinking of his companion; for he was looking at her abstractedly. But in another instant he had roused himself, and he rose to take his departure with an apology for having detained her so long.

Mrs. Arncliffe accompanied him to the hall-door. As he went through the hall she hesitated to ask him to visit at Framleigh-Place again. She had no special reason for this except a feeling that it would have been difficult for her to analyze. The suddenness of the introduction, the Captain's manner, the mystery connected with him, all united to cause her hesitation. But whatever her hesitation, he exhibited none. For as he stood at the threshold of the front door, he said, speaking with his habitual ease, "May I have the honor of paying my respects at some future day, Mrs. Arncliffe?"

He was indulging in a hypocrisy of society when he said

this, and he knew it. Else what had he meant when he had said to Blacker, 'If, when she shall know who I am and the demand that I shall make upon her, she should spurn me, let her look to it'?

But these words were to Mrs. Arncliffe as if they had never been spoken; and so she did not recognize in Captain Vernon, as he stood there with the smooth smile upon his face, the man who might have uttered them. But when she answered him, she said, "I shall be happy to see you again, Captain Vernon."

He acknowledged her acquiescence with a courtly bow and walked down the steps. She stood at the door until he had entered his carriage and had driven away. Stood there with a strange fascination upon her, to see him driving past the statues, and through the gate, and out into the highway toward Alderley. Stood there to catch a last glimpse of him turning back to look at her, as he waved a farewell with his hand.

Then she went slowly in, with a brightness in her eye that had grown apace whilst watching him, and the great hall-door of Framleigh closed on the last guest of all those who had crossed and recrossed its threshold that day.

CHAPTER III.

COUNTING TREASURES.

WHEN Captain Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, drove away from the park and the fountain and the statues of Framleigh-Place and left the vision of Mrs. Arncliffe, standing beside the marble pillars, behind him, he did not immediately return to the house in Balfour-street. He drove, by a road that diverged from the highway, into a little patch of woods, and as he urged Black Dick to his utmost speed he skirted for a mile the broad lands of Framleigh. Here and there the small farms of Mr. Arncliffe's tenantry dotted the country-side. Here and there the elm and the oak waved their branches above him, and from what he saw in his drive he formed a just conclusion of the influence that might spring from the possession of these great estates.

Turning over in his mind the chances of the exercise of that influence in his behalf, the need of which to right him once more he had declared in his conversation with Blacker, he drove on until his attention was attracted to a number of men on the road ahead of him who appeared to be performing some heavy labor. Some of these men were engaged in lifting, and some were carrying loads, and others were hammering at a frame-work which he could barely discern. As he drew near them he perceived that the road led up to a wooden bridge which crossed at that point a precipitous ravine. He checked the horse and alighted to observe the locality. It was a strange feature of the earth's surface running irregularly for a hundred yards or more, deep in the centre and growing shallow toward the ends. The bottom

was rocky and there were rocks jutting out from the jagged, precipitous sides, and as Captain Vernon held by a bush and looked over into it—with its perilous fall of sixty feet or more—he drew away from the edge with a shudder and walked to where the men were at work.

There was a great quantity of iron, in the shape of rails and stout chains and fluted columns, lying around, and the labor upon which the men were engaged was evidently the construction of an iron suspension bridge over the chasm. The novelty of the work in this retired spot, for the road was not strictly a public one, induced the Captain to question a man who seemed to be superintending the work of the others. He asked if that were a public bridge he was building? The man said no; the land belonged to Mr. Arncliffe, and the bridge was a fancy of his. Then the Captain thought that was an expensive fancy and said as much; but Mr. Arncliffe could doubtless afford the luxury as he was a rich man. And then he asked if there were any record in the neighborhood of how the earth's surface had become indented by the abyss in that manner?

Captain Vernon had no reason to ask this question. For often, when a boy, he had explored its depths, and he knew then, as he knew now, that generations of men for centuries had grown up and had lived and had died in ignorance of its origin. But he listened with much apparent interest as the man told him nothing more nor less than what he had known for so many years—that no tradition existed as to its origin, that it had been there for hundreds of years just as it was then, and that a desolate memory hung about it by reason of the fact that long ago two great lords of rival houses had fought a bloody combat with rapiers between its gloomy walls, in which both had been slain, and that the place was ever afterward known as the Baron's Grave.

"A man might die, if he should go too near the edge of that cliff, without the aid of swords?" said Captain Vernon suggestively, when the man had told him this.

"Aye, sir. A man might fall over into it and nothing could save him." And then he turned away, touching his hat, to attend to the workmen.

The Captain loitered about for a little while, examining the work. Then, with a word or two to the superintendent in the way of parting, he resumed his seat and drove back by the route he had come.

He was not so disposed to look about him during the ride back as he had been when driving along the same road a half-hour before. His face wore a thoughtful look as he flitted between the trees that lined the road and as he passed the neat hedges of the little farms. Was he thinking of what he had been told of the possibility of a man's falling into the Baron's Grave and of his not surviving it? Was he thinking of the parlor of Framleigh-Place and of the woman who had stood before him with her eyes bent upon the carpet when his shadow fell upon her? Or was he thinking of the house in Balfour-street and of the old man whom he had left there that morning, looking out of the window of the room in which he was born, and who, he knew, was patiently awaiting his return?

Whatever his thoughts, they did not seem of a kind to call forth any of the bitterness of his nature; and his face was as calm as it was thoughtful when the statues and the fountain fell upon his sight. He looked toward the house and at the great hall-door; but if he had expected to see the flutter of the pale silk dress that he had left in the doorway, when he had driven away, he was disappointed. There was nothing there to lead him to look a second time, and so he plied Black Dick with whip and voice until

the statues were lost in the distance and the intervening trees had hidden the house from his sight.

And now he stands once more before the house in Balfour-street, and once more the dust falls upon him from the lion's head as he enters and closes the door after him. Through the dark passage with its musty smell of age; up the creaking stairway with its damp and mouldy papering on the wall; into the room in which he was born, he walks. He looks around for the old man, but he is not there. But his eye falls upon the portrait above the mantelpiece. He gazes at it reverently and speaks aloud.

"If I could have found one woman in the world like her—one woman to change my nature and to teach me to understand the good, I might have been a better man."

A strange speech to come from his lips—strange in its melancholy, strange in its forgetfulness of self and strange in its tenderness; but he is strangely changed since the night before. Then he looks again at the portrait and turns away quietly, seeking the door. Now he is in the dark passage again, and he opens another door gently, searching for his companion. He stands on the threshold and looks in. It is the old man's room and he is in there busy about something. Upon the floor he has placed a box and he is seated in a chair bending over it. He has taken something from this box and he holds it in his hand, looking at it tenderly.

What is it? Can Captain Vernon, standing there in the dark doorway, distinguish what is in the old man's hand—or does his heart tell him?

It is nothing but a worn, faded slipper; but the old man touches it as gently as if it were a frail and priceless work of art. Now the bending figure puts the shoe in his lap and takes from the box something else which he holds up so that the light from the window may fall upon it, and

as he does this Captain Vernon, watching him, hears him speaking.

"In the whole country around there is only one hand this little glove will fit. In the whole country around there is not another hand like hers;" and then the glove is put away, by the side of the little shoe, in his lap, and his hand is busy in the box again.

The tall figure at the door looks on silently. Could it be given to disembodied spirits to take part, from the vastness of eternity, in what concerns the transitory passage of this life, and could it be given to his dead mother's spirit to look down from beyond the stars upon him standing there it might rejoice at the change that has come over him. For the traces of passion and cruelty upon his face have worn away and in their stead has come a look of remorse. Remorse for a life worse than uselessly spent. Remorse for the sorrow he had brought to his mother's heart before she died and left him, a wayward, reckless boy. Remorse for whatever of grief attaches to the failing years and gray hairs of the old man who sits before him counting his treasures. Remorse for the evil he had meditated against the woman whom he calls "Mrs. Arncliffe," and of whom the old man speaks as "Bertha."

With this softening influence upon him, he advances into the room. The old man is too intent upon what he is doing to notice his entrance; and so the Captain stands behind him for a moment and looks into the box. He sees a singular medley there. Old books and ribbons, and scraps of paper with writing upon them. The books are fingered and soiled and seem to have been books in which a child had learnt its first lessons. The ribbons, too, are crumpled and faded, and they seem, too, as if a child had worn them about her slender waist or had twined them in her hair. Upon the scraps of paper the writing is large and

uncertain—the writing of a child who is laboring through the rudiments.

When Captain Vernon has seen these things he lays his hand gently upon the old man's shoulder. "Blacker," he says, "don't you know that I have come back?"

The old man turns with a look of fear and huddles the glove and the shoe into the box.

"I beg pardon, Arthur. I did not hear you come in," he says, submissively. Then he sees that there is a kinder look than usual upon the Captain's face and he takes courage to say, "See here, Arthur. These are all I have to remind me, when alone, of Bertha."

With his eye upon the box, the Captain speaks to him. "Don't let my presence deter you in your examination," he says. "Come: I will sit down with you and we will look over the box together."

Blacker opens the box again and together they take out, one by one, the articles it contains; and if the old man examines them with a tender interest and touches them with a gentle care, Captain Vernon is not less intent or less careful. He takes a strange delight in knowing what the box contains—especially strange for him who scorns sentiment and is disposed to laugh at exhibitions of it. But now he respects these feelings of his companion, for in his own mind these poor, faded trifles upon which he looks are connected with the memory of the blue eyes and fair hair of the woman who had owned them when a child.

He has taken the glove from the box, and as his hand closes softly on it he says, "Where did you get these things, Blacker?"

Blacker is glad to tell him of how they came into his possession, for he is glad that his companion should speak kindly about them and appear to take an interest in them.

"You know, Arthur," he says, "I have always lived in

Bertha's neighborhood. I had been living near Mrs. Archibald's in Westmoreland ever since that time when—". He stops for a moment to pass his hand across his brow.

"Never mind that, Blacker. We can't help that now. Go on."

"While she was living at Mrs. Archibald's," the old man continues, "I lived in the village near by. And I have often stood, when nobody would observe me, by the fence of the play-ground while the girls were at play, looking at her and thinking how beautiful she was and how innocent she looked." He again passes his hand over his forehead and his mind appears to be dwelling on the time to which he refers.

"Well?" says the Captain kindly.

"It was during one of the summer vacations, and when Mrs. Archibald had gone down to the seacoast to spend the holidays, that I remained in the village before following them. For I thought, then, how happy I would be—at least how much happier with it than without it—if I could but get from the house something that had been Bertha's, something by which to remember her when she was away from my sight."

The Captain's hand closes again upon the glove, and as he looks at it he murmurs, "Yes, something by which to remember her when she is away from your sight."

"So I went to the housekeeper, after Mrs. Archibald's departure, and told her I had a fancy for old books and ribbons and rubbish about the house that might be thrown away. I said I would pay the servants for what I chose out of the lot, and when they brought me the old school books I took those that had her name in them, and I also took the ribbons and the gloves and a gown or two that she had worn. They all said I was mad; but as I paid them well for their trouble, they were always willing to

bring me what I asked. And that is how I got them together, Arthur."

The Captain holds the glove lingeringly in his hand as if reluctant to part with it. But finally he places it with the other little relics which Blacker had gathered and closes the cover of the box.

While the old man is making the box fast, Captain Vernon becomes, for a moment, abstracted. Then he twirls his moustache and a suggestion of his natural manner asserts itself. "Why do you not ask me about my visit to Framleigh?" he asks.

Turning the key in the lock and with his head bent over his work, Blacker makes answer, "Because I was waiting for you to tell me of it. I know that you do not like to be questioned."

"True, Blacker, I do not like to be questioned. I saw Mrs. Arncliffe to-day. I saw her surrounded by the greatest in the land, and no one there, Blacker, could have told but that she was born to the station she fills."

He cannot see the eager look pervading the face of the old man bending over the lock—the look that changes to exultation as he ceases speaking. The key is heard to turn apparently; but the box is locked finally and put away on the shelf. Then when that is done, the old man says with a proud look upon him, "So she looks as if she were born to it, does she? I wish that I were worthy of her—God bless her!"

"Had she been born to all the splendor that surrounds her she could not have been better able to carry out the duties of her position. If her happy fortune has been to see the world at her feet, or if she has become possessed of the power to compel society's adulation, she is worthy of it. Had she married a king, Blacker, instead of marrying a simple gentleman, she would have been worthy of the throne."

The old man gazes at him with the same eager expression. There are tears in his eyes but he does not feel them there and on his face rests the proud look it had worn when he said, "God bless her!"

Captain Vernon continues speaking. He is looking through the window and beyond, from where he sits, and he is thinking of the great house and of the woman whose reverie he had interrupted when he found her sitting wearily upon the sofa. "You know what I am, Blacker, and what I have been. But perhaps you do not know all that I am—" a fierce look springs to his eyes as he utters these words, but it passes away quickly; "and yet I felt, bad as I know myself to be, when I stood in her presence, that I could be a better man if the world would keep its hands from me."

The old man rises from his chair and bends on his knee before him. "Arthur! if you have done wrong in anything—and neither of us is guiltless on that score—if you have committed one action in your long years of wandering to which you look back with remorse, pray to be forgiven and live to a better life and a better appreciation of your fellows. For your dead mother's sake forget what you have been and live for what you may be!" The old man speaks impetuously. For he sees a vision of the reckless man whom he had fostered when a boy forsaking, in the future, the paths of evil and turning to the good. And he sees in the same future the vision of the woman whom he calls "Bertha" freed from his toils and no longer the object of plots and conspiracies.

"I cannot change the past, Blacker," returns Captain Vernon. "Dark as it is, it may not be darker than what is in store for me. But when I look back I do not see that I have always caused the evils I have known. I do see, that sometimes, in those fierce struggles with the world, I

was not always the aggressor. I can remember the time when I was not ashamed to bear my father's name; but when I reflect upon the causes that led me to abandon it, I am not afraid to say that, guilty as I have been, the cursed spirit that dogs a man to perdition and which follows him up with its persecutions has been just as much to blame. I care not for what the future may bring with it. Whatever it may be, I have a heart to meet it, Blacker."

The old man listens in silence and does not interrupt him; and Captain Vernon goes on speaking.

"When I said I might be a better man if the world would let me, I meant what I said. When I went away from this house to commence that conflict of life which all young men must commence, what follies or sins I may then have possessed were strengthened by contact with my fellows. Because I was passionate they resisted me. Because I was strong and reckless I crushed them when I was provoked. Had they been lenient with me I might have understood, better, those duties we all owe to each other; but now they have done their worst with me, and, if they could, they would hunt me down!" He looked fiercely at the door as if expecting some enemy to enter and confront him. Under the influence of the memories that are upon him, and in his hatred of his fellows, his face has passed from remorse to passion and the scar upon his cheek burns red and angry. For upon his mind is resting a vision of the past—the vision which from the shrouded years rose up when he sat musing before the fire, under the painted image of his dead mother, and seared his brain with its crimson hues!

When he speaks again, he says to the old man bitterly, "You have your treasures, Blacker, and so have I mine. If you hoard up with a miser's care the relics you have of her to whom you dare not speak and at whom you scarce

dare look, I too have my treasures—memories of what the world has done for me and of what I owe it!”

Then he rises in his gloomy mood and through the dark passage seeks his room. The old man listens to him as he strides through the hall and speaks to himself.

“Did he tell Bertha all—and if he did, what did Bertha say?” is the question the old man asks himself.

CHAPTER IV.**MR. BLACKER GOES UPON AN EMBASSY.**

IN the few days that elapse after his visit to Framleigh-Place, Captain Vernon does not appear upon the streets of Alderley. In the few days that are left to the sun of October to shine before it enters upon the cycle of November, he is closed in the house in Balfour-street and the dust does not fall from the lion's head in answer to his presence. The orders he has given to Blacker upon the subject of the arrangements of the household are so far followed that the laundress and the man from the public house with the day's meals appear at the front door at stated intervals, handing in or receiving what it is necessary that they should hand in or receive, and what work is to be performed inside is attended to by a simple-minded young woman whom Blacker, with Captain Vernon's permission, has secured from a neighboring asylum for orphans, and who, being possessed by long habit of the belief that the inside of four walls is a refuge from all worldly perils, and that beyond these ogres, and giants, and evil-minded dwarfs are constantly lying in ambush, does not appear upon the street unless specially directed, and contents herself with transitory views of life from the lofty stand-point of the dormer windows.

Captain Vernon, during these intervening days, is seated most of the time in the room in which he was born, and the only companion he has, if companion it may be called, is the portrait above the mantelpiece. When he is there for

hours, apparently in a reverie, he sometimes rises from his seat, walks through the passage until he has reached the door of the old man's room, and looks in. If the old man be not there he enters and goes to the window and gazes out at the prospect. For beyond the town, a mile away, upon the high ground whereon it stands, he can see, gleaming through the trees of the park, the white walls of Framleigh, and, if the day be a fine one, he may also catch glimpses of the statues and of the fountains. When he has stood there for a little while with the softened look upon his face, he takes from his pocket a glove (the glove the old man had counted among his treasures) and looks at it tenderly. Tenderly, if the look had been from a woman's eyes; strangely tenderly as coming from his. And then he gazes again at the white walls, at the statues and at the fountain, and, piercing with his mind's eye the intervening marble and masonry, he sees the vision of the gentle face which he knows is moving about the house with the flush that had mounted to it when he stood between it and the light of day.

When he has observed these things in this way, sometimes by the hour together, he places the glove in his pocket and walks along the passage once more to his room and seats himself before his table. The table is littered with a great mass of paper. Some of it is in manuscript, and some yet remains to be written upon. If Captain Vernon be answering letters he must needs have many correspondents; for all day (when he is not in the old man's room looking out of the window) he is engaged in writing, page after page. But it is noticeable that he does not seem satisfied with what he has written; for very frequently he reads over a great deal of the writing when finished, and crushes the paper in his hand with a frown and then throws it into the fire.

Sometimes (but not often, for he seems disposed to be alone during these days) he sends for the old man, saying that he wishes to speak with him. The topic of these conversations is invariably Mrs. Arncliffe.

If the Captain be, occasionally, in one of his passionate moods—such moods as come upon him when he crushes in his hand, and throws into the fire, what he has written—when he commences to speak of the woman the thought of whom is always resting upon his mind, he forgets, or seems to forget, the cause of his trouble. In these moments he tells Blacker that he did not have the heart, in his interview with Mrs. Arncliffe, to approach her upon the matter that had brought him to Alderley; that he will not do aught, or say aught, to bring sorrow to her; that if, in the course of time, he should think it necessary to secure Mr. Arncliffe's influence, he will speak, but not to her; that if her proud husband, in knowing the truth, should upbraid her for that of which she is guiltless and which she could not prevent, the making known of this cause of dissension should not come from his—the Captain's—lips.

Then is the old man happy. For when Captain Vernon speaks in this manner, upon his mind breaks again the hope of a happy future for him and for her.

It was after a conversation of this kind that one day the Captain said to Blacker, "Would you like to see Mrs. Arncliffe and speak to her and touch her hand?"

Why did he ask that question? To do this has been the old man's dream for years, and often in conversation with Captain Vernon has he spoken of it. But he answered, with a shade upon his face, "If I could do that and tell her what is on my heart and hear her say 'I forgive you,' I think I could die happy, Arthur."

"If you were to see her now, it must not be as you speak of. Time must work out its revenges. When the moment

shall come—for it must come at last—all will be made clear, and you may then hear her say, 'I forgive you.'” He pauses for a moment and looks in his abstracted way into the fire. Then he turns to the old man and says, 'Blacker, you shall go and see Mrs. Arncliffe. I do not feel in a humor to visit to-day. A week has passed since I told her I would call again.’”

“Go?” returned the old man eagerly; “but how?”

“How? Go and apologize to her for my failure to call. Say you are my friend—that I am ill and sent you to inquire after her health. That will suffice.”

“It will suffice for you and for me; but will it suffice for her? May she not think my presence an intrusion and speak to me coldly? Remember, she does not know me.”

“You need not fear that. If you present yourself before her as my friend, that will be a sufficient introduction. If I thought her a vain, frivolous woman I would not risk it. She is not like others. — Go, and do not betray yourself.”

If Captain Vernon's purpose were to afford Blacker an opportunity to speak with Mrs. Arncliffe, he gave no evidence of that purpose. He spoke in his usual way, and the old man knew his nature too well to question him as to his reasons.

“If you go to Framleigh,” continued the Captain, “are you quite certain that you can command yourself? If you see her face to face and listen to her voice, are you sure that you will not betray yourself and cause her to think strangely of you and of me? Because if you are not quite sure of this you had better not venture.”

It was a hard thing to do, Blacker said; but he believed he could do it. He would go through a great deal and venture much for the happiness of seeing her and speaking to her.

"Then go. Remember what transpires and when you return tell me of the interview."

The old man leaves Captain Vernon striding back and forth in his room. He goes through the passage and down the stairs and out of the front door into the street, and then walks briskly away.

The sun was shining with a pleasant glow, and the people who were out seemed cheerful enough; but the sun appeared more brilliant, and the people more cheerful, than ever before. The town-clock, ringing out the hour, rang with a blithe and merry peal as he listened to it; and the sound it brought to his ear was the sound of the name uppermost in his heart—Bertha.

Through the streets of the town, out into the broad fields, and on the high-way that led to Framleigh, he walked; and his steps were cheered by the chirrup of the little birds that hopped from branch to branch—little birds that chirped to one another and twittered to the wild-flowers growing on the roadside the same story of Bertha, Bertha!

It was in the heavens and in the air and in the streets of the town. It was in every balmy wind that passed him by and in every beautiful thing that met his sight. It was sung in the song of birds in the trees; it blushed in the leaves of the wild roses clinging to the hedges on either side of him; it was carried away on the breath of the autumnal winds sighing around him—carried away to meet other breezes which received it; carried away to circle through the whole world and to proclaim to other birds and flowers the goodness and beauty and tenderness of Bertha!

The little birds have followed him through the gates of the park, along the walks, among the statues, and up to the marble steps of the great house; and there they leave him. He passes his hand across his brow in his old way,

and then ascends the steps and stands at the entrance to the house.

In answer to his ring the door opens and discloses the face of the Martyr, who, from a certain wildness about the eye and a tendency to blink at the sight of the sun, appears to have been aroused from a profound repose.

"Can Mrs. Arncliffe be seen this morning; is she at home?" inquires the old man of the apparition that he has evoked by the ringing of the bell.

The sunlight shining in his eye and the question put to him by Blacker have aroused the Martyr. He is wide awake now and leans against the casing of the door with an easy grace as he makes answer in a leisurely way.

"Mrs. Arncliffe is at home. I don't know whether Mrs. Arncliffe can be seen or not." He furnishes this information after a conversational fashion, and scratches his chin softly with his finger, pursing up his lips as he does so, with a contemplative look at Blacker's hat. A moment or two elapses in this way. Finally, as the Martyr gives no evidence of life save to stretch his neck to one side and to look over the old man's head, as if attracted by something in the top of the nearest tree, Blacker tries him once more.

"If Mrs. Arncliffe be at home, and be visible, tell her that a gentleman is below who would wish to see her for a few moments."

The Martyr's eye slowly comes down from its inspection of the tree and settles again upon the rim of Blacker's hat. Then he yawns, as if laboring under a depression of spirits, and says, between a gulp and a choke, "Jeemes."

There is no one else there that Blacker can see, and he is therefore a little uncertain as to whom or to what the Martyr's language tends; but becoming aware of a shuffling of feet and a certain thick utterance of sounds, taking the shape of words, from the hall, he conceives, rightly, that

the Martyr's speech has reference to the owner of the shuffling feet and the broken utterance.

"What's up now, I wonder!" says the voice, angrily. "Can't you let a fellow sleep, I'd like to know?"

"Look-a-here," returns the Martyr, looking over his shoulder into the hall. "I say! ain't you awake yet? Ain't a hour long enough for you to sleep? You're a nice one, you are! I say! stir around there, will you?"

Thus invoked, the invisible owner of the shuffling feet rejoins, scornfully, "Who's a nice one, I'd like to know?"

"Why, you're a nice one, you are," from the Martyr.

"I am, am I?" from the voice.

"I say! are you a-moving? If you was a dog I'd know how to move you!" from the Martyr.

"Oh, ah! how would you move me if I was a dog, if that's what you're up to?" comes in a sarcastic tone, joined with a hollow laugh, from the hidden speaker.

"I'd kick you: that's how."

A deadly silence follows this intimation from the Martyr, and Blacker takes occasion to say, "I would like very much to know whether Mrs. Arncliffe can be seen."

The owner of the shuffling feet (who has apparently been stretching and otherwise refreshing himself after his slumber, partly by gaping and stamping with both feet on the carpet, and partly by sneezing) is now heard moving up the stairway, to carry the old man's message. He stops, however, for a moment, to say morosely, "Ain't the gentleman got no name, nor card, nor nothink?"

"Never mind the name or the card," says the old man, speaking vaguely over the Martyr's shoulder. "Mrs. Arncliffe does not know my name. Merely say that a gentleman wishes to see her a moment." Whereupon the Martyr (as if the other had not heard Blacker's answer) volunteers the information that the gentleman hasn't any

need of cards and what-not, and that there is no use in mentioning names; and then continues leaning against the doorway, whistling slowly and apparently engaged in taking a mental inventory of the statues.

There is now a little interval of waiting, during which Blacker, to whom no invitation to enter has been extended by the Martyr, contemplatively immersed in the prospect, walks with his hand behind him, to and fro, in front of the door. But finally, the erst invisible owner of the voice—made visible now in the shape of the Gorgeous Victim—comes down the stairway and imparts the knowledge, in a surly way, that Mrs. Arncliffe says the gentleman is to wait for her, and that she will see him presently. Then, with the Victim preceding him, with more of an air of being imposed upon and taken advantage of than ever, and the Martyr still studying the view before him with a meditative eye, Blacker is shown into the drawing-room, there to wait until Mrs. Arncliffe shall come down.

Left to himself, the old man looked about him with a very proud and gratified expression. More particularly did he fix his eye upon the portrait of Mr. Arncliffe, and he was still gazing at it when the door opened and Mrs. Arncliffe appeared. Blacker recalled, in her presence, what Captain Vernon had asked him: whether he were sure he could command himself if he stood face to face with Mrs. Arncliffe. He remembered these words, and the fear of dispelling the happiness of this moment strengthened him to go through with what he had been deputed to say to her. But if he had steeled his outward self against all detection, on her part, of the pride and the love with which he looked at her when she entered, that pride still rose up in his breast and filled his whole being. For there before him, so close to him that he could touch her hand, was she who entered into his thoughts by day and his dreams by night;

she to whom had once belonged the treasures he hoarded so sacredly; she who filled his daily conversations with Captain Vernon, and for whom he had no other name than "Bertha." Had he obeyed the impulse of his heart alone, he might have fallen at her feet and worshipped her. Had he spoken to her as every thought and desire in his mind dictated, he would have bent before her and, on his knees, would have implored forgiveness for the sin which the dead years shrouded, but which remorse made an ever present reproach to him. Had he forgotten who he was, and what he was, and the proud name she bore; had he forgotten the greatness that surrounded her life and the obscurity in which he dwelt, and, had he ceased to remember, above all else, the man who sat in the house in Balfour-street, under whose eye his mind lost its will and his arm its strength, he might have told her of that which she, too, when apart from the world and its heartlessness, wept over and yearned to know. But whatever may have been the thought uppermost in his mind, or whatever the expiation, unaccomplished as yet, which may have come from the expression of that thought in words, these found no birth in his speech when the door opened and Mrs. Arncliffe stood before him. He had come to Framleigh merely as Captain Vernon's representative, and as such he would remain to the end of the interview.

"I must apologize to you, Mrs. Arncliffe," he said, when the mistress of Framleigh had seated herself, "for what may seem an unwarrantable intrusion upon your privacy. But I hope for your forgiveness when you shall know that I have called this morning in behalf of my friend Captain Horace Vernon."

She bent her head slightly; possibly to hide the rising color in her cheek.

"I have come," Blacker pursued, "to bear to you Cap-

tain Vernon's apologies for not having called upon you since the day of his visit and to say that ill health must plead his excuse."

"Captain Vernon is not seriously ill, I trust."

"Not seriously, Mrs. Arncliffe. When he returned to Alderley on the day of your reception he appeared ill at ease. I live with him in the same house and I noticed that. He has not been on the street since that day."

She listened to him intently. With her fingers idly toying with a fold of her dress she replied to her visitor's remark.

"You say that Captain Vernon lives with you? Have you known him long?"

"I have known him from his infancy."

"Then you know his nature, I should fancy—intimately."

"Better, perhaps, than he does himself, Mrs. Arncliffe."

He spoke as if oppressed with a hidden care. She herself was not without her unspoken thoughts, for about her manner was an uncertainty which betrayed itself in the trifling with her dress. To the old man it seemed so natural that any one who knew Captain Vernon should speak of him, and perhaps, also, it seemed so natural, by association in his mind with other matters, that Mrs. Arncliffe should refer to him, that he accounted for her manner by reflecting upon the peculiar influence Captain Vernon exerted upon all with whom he was brought in contact—that, and a certain arrogance of tone with which he habitually spoke and which caused him to be remembered and to become the topic of conversation. When he considered, also, that, beyond Sir John Eden's introduction of the Captain, Mrs. Arncliffe knew nothing of his history, he was not surprised to hear her say, "Captain Vernon was presented to me at my last reception by a friend of mine. You will

understand my curiosity when I ask you, who know him, who he is?"

To this question, Blacker, remembering Captain Vernon's injunction to him on the night of his arrival, replied, in the formula given by the Captain himself for his guidance, "He is late of her Majesty's service."

It struck him as being somewhat strange that she should have been the first to make that inquiry. In the mystery that enveloped him and her and Captain Vernon, was he adding, he thought with a pang, to that mystery by this answer? Was he leading her astray, he thought, in repeating what he had been told to say if he were asked any question as to his—the Captain's—identity? He knew that Captain Vernon had, at one time, been in the army, but it was not under the name he had assumed since his return to England. Besides, had not Captain Vernon said that he had been cashiered for violating the regulations of the service? And then again, what had he meant when he had said that perhaps Blacker did not know all that he was? What had he meant by "all," and did that remark have any connection with the name he had assumed?

These doubts came thickly, and for the first time, upon the old man's mind. In his helplessness at that moment he felt that it would be far better if he were away from the gentle face of the woman who listened to him—away, so that no word of his should involve her in the dark mystery that brooded in the dust of the house in Balfour-street.

Mrs. Arncliffe observed his perplexity, and to relieve him said, "Perhaps my question was indiscreet. I should not have asked it."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Arncliffe," he hastened to answer. "I think it but natural that you should wish to know who the Captain is."

Even as he uttered these words he recalled Captain Ver-

non's warning to him, not to betray himself when brought face to face with Mrs. Arncliffe.

With her hand again at work folding and refolding the dress, and her eyes following the motion of her hand, Mrs. Arncliffe resumed her questioning.

"Since you have no objection to speak of Captain Vernon," she went on, "I will ask you another question: Is he not of a strange nature? Is he not cruel in disposition and careless of pain in others? You have known him from his infancy—you must be aware of his nature."

The troubled look came again upon the old man's face as she spoke. What had Captain Vernon said or done in her presence to induce her to ask him that? But as he could not lead her astray in this, he replied truthfully.

"I say to you, Mrs. Arncliffe, what I would not say to others. I speak of him to you as I know him. He is both cruel and dangerous. He is passionate in disposition and fearful in his angry moods. He is his own enemy and the worst enemy of those who care for him."

Her hand became motionless and she turned her eyes upon his face. There was a look almost of fear upon her as she repeated his words.

"His own enemy and the worst enemy of those who care for him?"

"Yes. He has been so from a boy, and age has brought no change with it. But why do you ask me of his nature? Have you seen him in one of his angry humors?"

There was a wandering expression in her eyes, and she did not reply immediately. It was as if she were repeating his words and were dwelling upon their meaning. But his question recalled her to herself, and she answered with as much indifference in her manner as she could command.

"I asked you that question because I saw in this room what I conceived to be an exhibition of his true nature.

One of the servants had offended him by his manner. I shall never forget the look he fixed upon the man. It was cruel and angry and dangerous. Oh, so cruel, I shudder to think of it!"

She spoke more as if she were finding words in excuse for her question than as giving a true reason for what she had asked, and the inattentive look came into her eyes when she ceased.

There was a silence between them for a little while which the old man did not break with words. Through the slightly open window-blind a yellow ray from the October sun pierced the darkened room and fell upon her hair, tipping it with a golden lustre. Her cheek was resting upon her hand and her eyes were fixed mechanically upon the rose in the carpet. He looked at her, and at the solitary ray falling upon her, and to his mind it seemed like a halo resting upon her. The long self-control that he had exercised whilst in her presence was beginning to yield to the mysterious longing that was a part of his existence—the longing to tell her all and to plead for her forgiveness. He felt that, if he should remain longer in her presence, Captain Vernon's warning would be forgotten and that he would betray himself in speech or manner; and so he rose to take his leave of her.

As she stood before him, a yearning crept into his heart—a passionate desire to touch with his lips the little hand resting upon the back of the chair in which she had been sitting. He thought of her goodness and gentleness; how she had been the patient watcher at the sick-beds of the poor among Mr. Arncliffe's tenantry; how that same hand had often held the soothing drink to fevered lips which were too weak even to thank her; he remembered how all the country around prayed for heaven's blessing upon her when her name was mentioned among them, and it em-

boldened him to say to her, "If, Mrs. Arncliffe, scarce knowing you as I do, I should presume upon your goodness to ask you that which might offend you, may I still rely upon that goodness to acquit me? You are the good angel of those here in Alderley who have no other friend but you. It is your hand that brings comfort to the afflicted and the weary of heart. It is your hand that feeds the poor and gives raiment to the outcast beggar on the highway. It is your hand that is lifted only to raise from the dust and never to humble—may I kiss that hand, Mrs. Arncliffe?"

There was no false shame about her. She did not frown and draw herself haughtily away from the old man bending so submissively before her as he spoke; but she held out her hand to him and said with a smile, "What little I do you value too highly. What little I do is little enough circumstanced as I am, with all these riches about me. But here is my hand, sir; you may kiss it if you like." He bent and touched it lightly with his lips. And as he did so, he, too, besought heaven's blessing upon her.

And then, almost before she was aware of his departure, he had left her hastily and was going down the steps into the sunlight, which seemed less bright than the presence he had left.

Through the open window she looked at him walking away, with his head bent upon his breast, and spoke to herself.

"A strange friend for Captain Vernon!"

Then, when these words came from her, she wandered away in a maze of thought. Sitting at the window, she gazed out upon the rustling trees with their faded livery of autumn and with the yellow October sun falling upon them. Motionless for a long time, and with a dreaming expression in her eyes, there was no evidence of remem-

brance about her of the interview that had just closed. And yet upon that interview her mind was dwelling. Vaguely, perhaps, and with a faintly-defined purpose in her thoughts, but still earnestly, intently. It was like a low wind rising with the decline of a summer day and which gathers into a tempest with its close. It was like the first pale warning of the coming dawn, flaming into a fiery hue with the red sun of the morning. Like these was the knowledge that, gradually, and with a thrill of shuddering horror, broke upon her. Still looking out upon the trees of the park, still motionless in form and feature, the tempest was rising slowly in her mind, and the flame of a terrible knowledge was breaking upon her sense. As this knowledge, faint at first and born of her reverie, resolved itself before her, she clenched her hand until a livid mark was left where the nails had bruised the flesh and held it for a while before her eyes. Then, with both hands pressing upon her bosom, she rose and walked the room. Walking with a white face and a hasty step, a moan came from her lips, which was followed by a wringing of her hands and a wailing cry of Oh, no, no, no! And now, with that wailing cry intensified into a burst of passionate weeping, she fell upon her knees before her husband's portrait and seemed to beseech it with clasped fingers. With her face buried in her hands and her fair hair falling about her cheeks; with that dreadful excess of tears upon her and the blanched hue creeping over her neck; she knelt in the abjectness of her misery, with the storm howling around her and the lurid light of a guilty understanding burning into her brain.

For, however she wept because of them; however she prayed to be delivered from the wrong and the sin and the shame of recalling them; she could not blot from her mind the words that the old man had used in speaking of Captain

Vernon: He is his own enemy and the worst enemy of those who care for him.

And, thinking of those words, these questions, bringing with them the storm and the flame, rose before her as she wept in her self-abasement:

Do I care for him? Will he be an enemy of mine?

CHAPTER V.

THE RISING OF THE SHADOW.

DO I care for him? Will he be an enemy of mine? Solemn questions, indeed, were these which Mrs. Arncliffe, vainly essaying to shut them out from her, saw rising before her compelling an answer. Solemn at any time to a woman's heart, even when that heart is free to give, and how much more solemn for her, who had laid her life's duty at the feet of another. Giving to them her thought, struggling against the inevitable conclusion upon which she did not dare to dwell, she still wept as if her tears could wash away the memory of him who had caused them. Then, when the sun which had glared fiercely upon her when she first had sat at the window had so far filled his allotted course that the shadows were lengthening from the statues and the trees in the park, she rose from her knees and sat before the fire with a dreary look upon her colorless face. So sitting, always avoiding that problem and as often reverting to it; messages had come to her from the dining-room, saying that dinner awaited her presence. Messages had come from the coachman, announcing that the carriage was ready for her evening drive. But she had waved the messengers away, and the cook dozed over the fire and the coachman slept on the carriage-box whilst she sat and thought.

In that train of thought, and in those self-communings, her mind had gone wandering back to other scenes. It had gone down to the home she had left when she had as-

sumed her husband's name. It had gone down to the seaside where she had first met Mr. Arncliffe. It had flitted about the quiet cottage in Westmoreland where dwelt the woman who had fostered her infancy. It had lingered lovingly in the churchyard where was the grave of her mother. It had rested heavily upon the house in Brighton in which Mr. Arncliffe had asked for her hand.

Every little circumstance that had transpired in those days came back to her. Her mind dwelt on the long struggle between the dictates of her heart and her sense of what she owed the woman who had protected her when Mr. Arncliffe had proposed to Mrs. Archibald to make her ward his wife. She recalled the sacrifice she had made, the anguish and the tears, and the resolve to do her duty in her allotted sphere. But, in that moment, did she reproach those of her friends who had urged her to marry Mr. Arncliffe? No; for she also recalled Mrs. Archibald's words to her when she had gone with him to meet her adopted mother in the arbor. Mrs. Archibald had said to her then: Bertha, if you do not love Mr. Arncliffe, and if you can never love him as you should love him, do not marry him. But if you do not love him now, and if you think that in some future day you can be all to him that a wife should be, it is better that you should be his wife.

There was no reproach, then, in her mind as she sat thus thinking, against the woman who had spoken these words. If she had done wrong in marrying Mr. Arncliffe, the wrong was her own. If she had permitted herself to accept the solemn responsibility of becoming the wife of a man whom she did not love, and if she had trusted to the barren hope that the future would bring that love with it which she did not give at the altar, she could have no reproaches for others. If there were any reproaches to be uttered, they were to herself for what she had done of her-

self; if there were any tears to be shed, they were to be shed in expiation of her own conduct.

When Mr. Arncliffe had met her in a throng at Brighton, and had singled her out as his companion for the dance, and had spoken civilly to her, she had accepted these as the civilities which society enforces. When, accompanied by a friend, he sought Mrs. Archibald's house and became a visitor there, she saw nothing in this inadmissible in the ordinary course of social relations. Had she looked into her heart then, she would have found there no love for him. She would have found respect for his position and appreciation of his merits—nothing more. She could never have supposed that the proud exclusive man, who was her senior by so many years, had any other purpose in his visits than to express the pleasure he derived from an acquaintance with Mrs. Archibald's family. Mr. Arncliffe was the last of his race and was a man eminent in the councils of the nation. His fortune was in keeping with his position. From this fact, and from the dignity of his rank, had she ever thought of him in connection with marriage, she would more naturally have supposed that, had it been his desire or intention to marry, he would have chosen a wife from his own sphere. In addition to which, his connection with Government would seemingly have led him, in forming an alliance, to let his choice fall upon a woman who, by becoming his wife, would strengthen his influence with that of her family.

Mr. Arncliffe's conversation when at Mrs. Archibald's was nearly always upon the state of the country. Beyond this he seemed to have no thought; and if occasionally he would ask Miss Archibald to sing some song that was a favorite of his, he spoke in so courteous a manner and with so little apparent interest in his tone that she understood his purpose to be merely that of the well-bred gentleman

who wished to appear interested in her accomplishments. The coldness and reserve which was natural to him precluded the possibility of any great intimacy between Bertha and himself, and although he seemed to derive pleasure in her society, his attentions were not more marked to her than to other ladies met casually in their social circle.

It was, therefore, under these circumstances and with this knowledge of Mr. Arncliffe's character, a matter of surprise to her when, one day, a young friend said to her, "Dear Bertha, do tell me when your marriage is to come off. We are all so anxious to know. I am told you have taken the house in London which was occupied by the French ambassador last season."

"Marriage? With whom, pray?"

"Why, with Mr. Arncliffe."

It was then, for the first time, that she began to understand that perhaps Mr. Arncliffe did have intentions of marriage in visiting the house so frequently. Although she could never recall a word he had spoken to her since the commencement of their acquaintance looking to this consummation, she could remember a certain respectful attention, not unmixed with kindness, with which he had always greeted her on entering the house and a certain regret in his manner at parting from her. When this comprehension of his possible purpose broke upon her mind, she looked into her heart to see if there were any love for Mr. Arncliffe lurking there—such a love as would justify her in accepting his hand, should he offer it. But she found it barren of this feeling. She felt no throbbing there at his presence; she felt no yearning when he was away from her for the coming of the hour which was to reunite them. In her mind Mr. Arncliffe held the place of a casual acquaintance and that was all. Whilst she felt all the respect due him, and whilst she appreciated the influence his position in life

commanded, the respect she felt for him and the influence he exerted over her were, more than aught else, the result of a certain fear she experienced when in his presence.

In all the world there were, probably, not two more dissimilar natures than Philip Arncliffe's and that of the woman whom he had chosen to be his wife. His nature was cold and undemonstrative, proud and careless in small matters. Hers was loving and tender, and one that naturally sought a protector. She had dreamed of the man to whom she would one day give her heart; but Mr. Arncliffe occupied no part in the picture of her dreams. She had had in her moments of self-communion, like all girls of her age, visions of the future and of the home that would some day be hers, and of the loving heart that would share it with her; but the home with which she had mingled her hopes was not the home that would own Mr. Arncliffe for master.

With this feeling upon her, she watched Mr. Arncliffe's visits to the house with a painful interest. She felt that a proposal for her hand would receive the approval of her adopted mother. She felt this for the reason that a marriage with him would place her high in the world's esteem and that, as a matter of worldly interest, it was the best that she could make.

One day she sought Mrs. Archibald. She had determined to make known to her the fears that beset her and her resolve never to marry. She implored Mrs. Archibald not to urge her to marry Mr. Arncliffe, if he should wish to make her his wife. In that interview she told her adopted mother that she did not love him; that his riches were no inducement to her; that the rank he held offered no charms to her; that she had no ambitions to gratify, and that all she asked was an earnest, devoted love, and such a love he could not give her. Mrs.

Archibald heard her out to the end, and then kissed her and said to her, "The intentions you impute to Mr. Arncliffe, Bertha, may not exist. I need not say how happy I would be to see you his wife. For, in marrying him, all that fortune or position could give, would be yours. Go to your room now and try to think more kindly of Mr. Arncliffe; and if he should ever speak to you about marriage, come to me and I will tell you what to do."

After that conversation, if she did not, as Mrs. Archibald had told her, try to think better of Mr. Arncliffe, she tried, at least, to steel her heart against the passionate longings of her nature. Day after day and night after night the sacrifice went on, and when Mrs. Archibald would go to her room (as was sometimes her custom, to see if her sleep was undisturbed) she would find the tears still wet upon the fair young face, silent witnesses to the struggle that prevailed in her bosom.

At last, what Bertha had feared to contemplate, what had cost her so many nights of anguish and tears, came to pass. She was walking with Mr. Arncliffe in the garden. When with him she never permitted her feelings to gain the ascendancy. She had schooled herself to look forward to the marriage with him as a part of the duty she owed her second mother; and so, if on these occasions when alone with him she did not exhibit any great pleasure at seeing him, she did not, at least, appear careless of his presence.

When Mr. Arncliffe, after they had walked for a few minutes among the flowers, asked her to seat herself for a little while as he wished to speak to her upon a subject of importance to both of them, she construed his meaning aright and prepared herself to listen patiently to what he was about to say to her.

"You may have thought, Miss Archibald," he said in his proud, cold way, "that my visits to this house have had

a purpose in them. If you have ever thought this, you have thought truly. They have had a purpose; they have had a meaning. You were that purpose. Miss Archibald, do you understand me?"

Bertha replied to this, without lifting her eyes from the ground, "I do, Mr. Arncliffe."

"Then you consent to become my wife?"

"Yes, Mr. Arncliffe." She gave him her hand mechanically and he held it in his, saying, "Now, Bertha, let us go and seek Mrs. Archibald."

These were the few words that decided her married life. How different from the words her mind had been accustomed to dwell upon when, in her dreams, she had pictured to herself the man who would one day seek her love!

They found Mrs. Archibald in the arbor. Mr. Arncliffe waited for Bertha to speak; but as she did not seem inclined to commence the conversation, he spoke to her adopted mother.

"Bertha has consented to become my wife, Mrs. Archibald. When I first referred to this matter in conversation with you, I told you, if you will remember, that I knew Bertha's nature. I told you also that I knew she did not love me as a woman should love a man whom she is to marry; but as I said to you then, and as I say to Bertha now in your presence, I believe that with time she will learn to appreciate me. Bertha is aware of the fact that in marrying me she will secure a position that none dare assail. If she love distinction she will find it in the home to which I shall take her. If she would benefit others by the exercise of charity, the fortune at her disposal will satisfy her utmost benevolence. I do not offer this as a plea, however, that she should marry me. No. But in assuming my name she shall become a part of my life and a part of the history of my race." He spoke these last words with a

proud flush upon his face which struggled through the pale hue of his complexion. In placing the honor of his race in her keeping, Bertha felt grateful to him. For she knew him well enough to know that the one thought which filled his mind above all others was, that no trace of dishonor had ever attached itself to his name.

She felt it necessary to say something in reply to his words.

"If I should marry you, Mr. Arncliffe," she said, "I will do my duty so far as God gives me strength to do it. If you place in my hands the name that is so sacred to you, I will preserve it to the end as spotless as when you gave it. I do not know yet what love is. I have never felt the impulse. But on my knees I will pray to heaven that if it should ever come to me, it shall come for you to whom alone it shall belong. I am grateful that you have chosen me to be your wife—but you must reserve your decision until mother shall have told you my history."

Tears were falling from her eyes and she had laid her face in Mrs. Archibald's bosom. Mrs. Archibald let it rest there, and said to her gently, "Mr. Arncliffe knows all about that, Bertha. I told him everything when he first mentioned to me the hope he had of one day making you his wife."

"To other men, Bertha," said Mr. Arncliffe, taking her hand in his, "that of which you speak might have been an obstacle. To me it is not. You cannot be held to account for the acts of others. When I marry you, I do not marry your family. But in becoming my wife you must promise me this—the only promise I exact from you—that you will hold no communication without my consent with any of your family who may be alive. Do you promise this?"

From the bosom of Mrs. Archibald's dress she murmured,

"I do promise that, Mr. Arncliffe. It is your privilege and I obey."

It was then that Mrs. Archibald had said to her that if she did not love Mr. Arncliffe and had no hope of ever loving him she should not marry him; but if she did not love him then, and if she believed that some day she could love him as a wife should love her husband, then it were better that she should be his wife.

To this Bertha replied, "If prayer can bring that love to my heart, I will love him, mother."

There was nothing more said then; and Bertha, Mr. Arncliffe and Mrs. Archibald went into the house.

The marriage did not take place until the family had returned to Westmoreland.

From the day upon which she had promised to marry Mr. Arncliffe to the day of her marriage, Bertha had sought to teach herself to love him. She had prayed that the future would bring that love which she could not give when she surrendered her happiness into his keeping. She had striven to hold away from her the curse that clings to the unloving wife—the life-long deceit that bears a smile upon the face and bitterness in the heart. She had sought to change respect into affection, and to draw the mysterious passion from the daily experience of Mr. Arncliffe's uniform kindness and care for her. She had essayed to crush out from her mind and heart whatever conflicted there with his nature; but though she had brought herself to look calmly upon the fate reserved for her, at times, when he had chilled her with the cold formality of his speech, there came the revival of the old slumbering feelings that had haunted her dreams—the golden vision of her girlhood which pointed to the day when she would love one who would know her as she was and would be loved as she wished to be loved.

With her heart still unchanged toward Mr. Arncliffe she entered upon her new life. The bells that rang out her marriage-peal found her with the calmness of despair resting upon her. When she crossed for the first time the threshold of Framleigh, and was led into the apartment which was thereafter to be her own, she fell into a passion of tears. She recalled the story of her life, and in that interval of weeping grew stronger in her self-denial and better fitted to fill the duties marked out for her.

When Mrs. Archibald, who had accompanied her to Framleigh, left her to return to her home in Westmoreland, she spoke to Bertha long and seriously and closed with these words:

“You are a wife now, Bertha, and you must act in a manner becoming your new sphere. Whatever the wishes you may have had before your marriage, whatever may have been your expectations prior to that event, and which you find unfulfilled in your present condition, those wishes and those expectations must be blotted utterly from your mind. I did a mother’s duty to you when you had no mother, and the words I speak to you now are the words that she would have spoken to you. There are some things in the story of your mother’s life which I have kept concealed from you. I did this because I did not wish to cause you unnecessary pain. But now that you have assumed the responsibilities which are associated with the married state, it is proper that you should be made aware of what was before concealed. If you should ever be in any trouble of mind do not fail to let me know of it. If it be a trouble that your husband can remove, confide it to him. He will think better of you for it and you will think better of yourself. Whenever you wish to know the truth about your mother’s history, write to me and you shall know all.

And now good-bye and God bless you, Bertha, and give you strength to continue as you have begun."

This was the retrospect and these were the words that Mrs. Arncliffe, sitting in the fading light in the drawing-room, recalled. As she dwelt upon these events the dreams so long kept under control arose again within her, mingled with that terrible dread of dwelling upon the cause that had renewed them. She had told Mr. Arncliffe in that interview in the garden, that she had never loved and that she did not know the impulse of love. Was the darkness in which she sat rivalled by the darkness in her mind, as these words came back to her? For when the solemn questions which she had asked herself in that long reverie rose before her: Do I care for him? Will he be an enemy of mine? did she feel that the curse from which she had prayed to be delivered had fallen upon her? Did she feel that she loved Captain Vernon?

Her cheek became red and white by turns and she buried her face once more in her hands. She essayed to shut out from her mind the dark eyes with their respectful look—the haughty eyes that were gentle only when fixed upon her. She sought to forget the words that he had uttered on the day when he had stood before her. She sought to disbelieve the prompting of her heart which told her, in that moment, that a shadow had come between her and her husband. But in vain. For with every attempt to crush out the memory of Captain Vernon, she questioned herself; and the answer her conscience returned was this: If this be not love, then what is it?

Love! but not for the man to whom it belonged and to whom it had been pledged at the altar! Love! but not that love wherewith the dreams of her girlhood had been filled! Love! that brought with it rebellion and tears!

Love for the man whom she had seen but once—the reckless, cruel man who, his oldest friend had told her, was his own enemy and the worst enemy of those who cared for him!

Slowly came up the darkness from without and wrapped her in its shadows. Slowly rose within her the dreadful darkness which had come between her and Mr. Arncliffe.

The Victim had come in, saying, "Do you wish lights, ma'am?" But no answer had come from her sitting silently, looking into the coals; and the Victim, amazed, had gone out quietly, saying to the Martyr, inspecting his calves in the hall, that Mrs. Arncliffe was out of sorts since the old 'un (meaning Blacker) had gone away.

When she saw that the night was wearing on, she rose from her chair and knelt beside it. And then she prayed for strength to resist temptation and to come out of this sore trial with the victor's palm.

When she had done this, she reverted again to Mrs. Archibald's parting words to her: "If you should ever be in any trouble of mind do not fail to let me know of it. If it be a trouble that your husband can remove, confide it to him. He will think better of you for it, and you will think better of yourself. Whenever you wish to know the truth about your mother's history, write to me and you shall know all."

But these words brought with them no consolation. What had she to tell her adopted mother; that she loved Captain Vernon? What had she to confide to her husband; that another had usurped that place in her heart which should be filled by him alone? No; better death than that. She would let the feeling that had crept into her heart lie there and die among the other unrecorded hopes that were buried there. But she could write to Mrs. Archibald and could ask her to make known that mystery of her

life which Mr. Arncliffe had deemed no obstacle to their marriage. She could do this. And when it was told to her, she would feel more grateful to him for confiding his honor and his name into her keeping; and with the gratitude that would come with the knowledge of what was unknown to her then, she would better understand the trust he had placed in her—the sacrifice that would never be repaid with wrong by act of hers.

So with this resolution upon her she went out of the darkness of the parlor and sought her own room. And there, through the long night, the memories of the old time came about her as she wrote to Mrs. Archibald.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. ARNCLIFFE TO MRS. ARCHIBALD.

"FRAMLEIGH-PLACE, October 28.

I sit down, my dear mother, to write to you to-night with a feeling that has never possessed me before. When I have written to you that, in spite of all my struggles to the contrary, I was unhappy here in Framleigh—ungratefully so, perhaps—and when you have sent back word to me, chiding me for what you called my 'romantic nature,' I would sometimes smile at what I thought was a delusion of my own which, by too much thought devoted to it, I had finally come to believe in as a real cause of pain. Your words, then, would recall me to a sense of the duties I owed to my married state; and when I remembered what Mr. Arncliffe had done for me, what indulgence he had always shown for my weak, foolish nature, I would wipe away the starting tears which would come at the sight of your familiar handwriting, and would return to the pursuit of my duties, if not contented, at least determined to follow the path I had marked out for myself.

"Sometimes, when I thought of our old home in Westmoreland, and of you sitting upon the lawn as you used to sit with me upon a stool at your feet, in that happy time before I knew Mr. Arncliffe and before he took me away from you, I would go to my room and shut myself in it all day and cry at the remembrance of the gay, happy girl I then was, and at the contrast that presented itself in my condition as Mr. Arncliffe's wife. Not that I had any bit-

terness against him for what has happened; but I thought then, as I think now, that it would have been better for him—and oh, how much better for me!—had he left me in my humble home when I told him that I did not love him—had he left me to dream away my life, and had he gone elsewhere to look for a better wife than I can ever be to him.

“This letter you must look upon as a confession. Perhaps not a confession of all, but a confession that shall make you know and understand my unhappiness. When we were first married Mr. Arncliffe remained most of his time at Framleigh, and his manner was kinder than it had ever been before or has ever been since. It was in that time that I thought his kindness to me would reconcile me, after a while, to my married life. It was in that time I fondly hoped that my old thoughts and feelings had passed away, and I looked forward to the day when I would be enabled to think of my girlish fancies as of something that was buried in the past, never more to be spoken of or thought of. In those days Mr. Arncliffe did not chide me for the betrayal of what was on my mind. Sometimes when he found me in tears and asked me the reason of my despondency, if I would tell him I feared that I would never be the wife to him I should be, he would kiss my tears away and would take me to his heart, until I had forgotten my grief. I thought, then, that as I became better acquainted with him, as I came to understand his cold nature, I might yield myself passively to what was to be and forget what I had hoped to be.

“But this kindness on his part was not to last. When I went with him to London to remain there during the session of Parliament, I began to notice that change in him which has clung to him ever since. It was then, as in these days when I first knew him, that he spoke of nothing,

thought of nothing, cared for nothing, but the duties of his office and the party questions it involved. He took me into society. He watched me ceaselessly to detect any awkwardness in my manners. When I so far misunderstood my position as his wife as to be natural, he would frown at me and would frighten me into being hypocritical. It was a wretched life—constantly wearing the mask, constantly with my husband's eyes upon me as if he feared I would disgrace him, constantly living so false an existence that I sometimes wonder I did not become hardened into utter deceit. I think that if I had become false to others and only true to him, he would have liked me the better for it. But I could not make the pretence where I did not feel the impulse; and so I saw that I was gradually losing him.

“When, the session being over, we returned to Framleigh, he never remained longer than a few days with me. It was always something about the country, or his borough, or his party, that took him away. Now in London, where he remained for weeks at a time, now among the people of his borough—he would go away and leave me here alone. I one day asked him to permit me to accompany him in these journeyings, and he said to me that the wife of Philip Arncliffe should be at the head of her husband's household on his ancestral seat. He said that, as he had so often spoken before, in his cold way, and I knew that his mind was resolved upon that point. His injunctions to me were, ‘When I am absent from Framleigh, you are to receive my friends in my stead and to act in all things as if I were present. I rely upon you to support the Arncliffe dignity during my absence. See to it that you do not fail in that, Bertha.’

“Oh, mother! was that a fit parting between husband and wife!

“But why should I linger upon this subject? When he

came, periodically, to Framleigh he appeared more interested in a bridge which he has ordered to be built upon the estate than in my society. If ever I tried in my foolish way to draw him into conversation—which I often did as a part of my duty to him—he would listen to me wearily for a little while until, seeing that he was in no humor for conversation, I would disturb him no longer. If ever I sought—again in my foolish way—to use those little arts with him which I thought would please him—if ever I passed my hand through his hair or leaned my head against his breast, he would patiently bear it for a little while and would then say, ‘There, child, go now. I do not wish to be disturbed.’

“And so my life went on. So it went on until I learned that if my husband ever cared for me he had forgotten that feeling. So it has gone on until I have come to the knowledge that as his wife I am allied not so much to him as to his name. I feel that to him I am only Mrs. Arncliffe, and nothing more. It was necessary that he should marry. He was the last of his race, and, as he said to me, he did not wish his name to become extinct; and so he chose me to bear the sad dignity of his name.

“But let me forget this, and let me go on to what I have to say to you now. If I have ever written that, do what I would to prevent it, I could not be happy in the position I occupy as mistress of Framleigh, and if you have ever thought I was indulging in querulous complaints, do not, my dear mother, disbelieve me now when I tell you that had I foreseen what my life was to be I would rather have died than have consented to become Mr. Arncliffe’s wife.

“Oh, mother! I do not love him! I never, never can love him! I cannot tell you how that knowledge has come to me. I cannot tell you through what tears and crushing agony of mind I have learnt that my love can never be my

husband's. If you were with me, and if I could lay my head upon your bosom, as in the old time that can never come again, I might tell you what I feel and think. And if I were to do that you would pity me, I know, and would pray that I may do what is mine to do and be better for the sacrifice I am making to-day.

"In my wretchedness I think of all that you have been to me, and of all that you have suffered for my sake, and I feel grateful that in this hour I can turn to you for counsel and sympathy, and that I still have a guide in you. When I reflect upon my own weakness; for I cannot recall the time when my will was not subject to another's; I ask myself whether I know my strength of purpose well enough to feel that I can meet temptation resolutely if it should ever beset me? Can I ever forget that miserable weakness of my nature which makes me shrink from opposition, when I look back upon what is past and look forward to what is to come?

"You remember how I shrank, when a girl, from all that was rough in my companions. Years have brought no change with them in this respect, and I fear that I may meet some day—I, so little cared for by him who should be near me and be my protector—some nature, stronger than mine, which will rule me for good or for evil.

"My words are strange to you? Forgive me for what I write. I can scarcely understand myself; and I have only this wretched conviction that I am unhappy—more unhappy than you can conjecture—more miserable than I ever thought I would be in marrying Mr. Arneliffe.

"I ask myself why is it that I am united to a man whom I can never love? If I were back with you—away from here—in the peace and quiet of our dear home in Westmoreland, where my life was so calm with no doubts to torture me; if I were away from Mr. Arneliffe—do not re-

proach me for saying this, for you do not know what despair fills my heart as I write—I would never ask to leave your side again.

“That I have sought to do my duty to myself and to my husband, the sufferings I now experience bear witness. And if my strength be equal to my resolve I will perform that duty to the end.

“How wild must seem my words to you! Do you not give me your sympathy? In the long, weary days I spend here alone, I expiate—oh, how terribly!—the falsehood I spoke at the altar. I awake in the night to find my pillow wet with the tears that have fallen from my eyes in my sleep. And they are the more bitter because they come too late, mother, too late!

“It was not so heretofore; but now my life is a blank. If there be a single picture in it to relieve its dull monotony, it is a picture from which I turn with a shudder.

“What will be your thoughts of me hereafter! And oh, what will I think of myself!

“Write to me, mother, and tell me of that part of my life’s story which I have never known. Whatever heretofore has been obscure in that life make plain to me. If there be any great sorrow associated with my poor mother’s memory let me know it. The ordeal through which I have passed has made me strong enough to bear it now. There is strength in despair, and that strength is mine. In stepping from the confines of my youthful life, I have comprehended in all its bitterness how true a thing it is that through suffering a woman’s heart must learn its final lesson. Looking to the future, I see only an ever-living remorse there. I look to the past and my sin rises before me. Whichever way I turn is darkness with the shadow of that remorse resting upon me, or with the sense of the awful responsibility I assumed when I bartered my happi-

ness—and worse, my self-respect—to become the wretched woman I am.

“And now, my falling tears warn me to close. I can scarce see the paper upon which I write. My tears blot it from my sight. Would they could blot from my heart the agony I feel!

“Your loving

“BERTHA.”

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN VERNON MAKES A DISCOVERY.

WHEN Blacker returned from Framleigh after having acted as ambassador from Captain Vernon to Mr Arncliffe, he found the former patiently awaiting his return.

Captain Vernon listened intently as the old man narrated the events of his visit, and as he dwelt upon the kindness and beauty of the woman of whom he spoke as "Bertha." He seemed to take a growing interest in what she had said and in Blacker's description of her appearance. There was but one circumstance which the old man had refrained from mentioning; and that was the fact of his having kissed Mrs. Arncliffe's hand. The rest he had told as it had occurred. When he reached, in his narrative, that part in which he had described Captain Vernon as his own enemy and the worst enemy of those who cared for him, the Captain frowned.

"How did you dare pass judgment on me?" he said. "Have I constituted you the judge of my actions?"

"When she spoke to me about your nature I could not have told her other than the truth. If I am to die for it, would not, willingly, deceive her or tell her a falsehood."

If this answer did not please Captain Vernon he did not exhibit his displeasure. He asked no other questions in regard to the matter, but went on to speak of Mrs. Arncliffe.

His manner did not seem to partake of a personal interest. He appeared to listen to the account of the interview

with an attention which was referable to the pride with which Blacker narrated it. That mysterious connection which held them together, and of which Mrs. Arncliffe was the link, seemed to dictate his questions and to be the origin of whatever interest he displayed. If there were any other cause for his inquiries he did not make his companion a sharer in his feelings.

During the conversation the Captain had been sitting at his table. Before him was a mass of written paper. He had been writing at the time of Blacker's return and had paused in his work to speak to him about Mrs. Arncliffe. When Blacker had narrated, over and over again, all that had occurred on his visit to Framleigh, Captain Vernon became abstracted and fixed his eye gloomily upon the scattered pages. His brow was contracted and his hand was clenched tightly upon the table.

"See here, Blacker," he said after a while, speaking abruptly. "Here is a part of what the world owes me and of what I owe the world. Will the hours of labor I have given to this work, trying to fashion a case which will induce justice, benefit me, think you, or will I be a loser in the end?"

He brought his hand down heavily as he spoke. Blacker made no response to this question. He knew that Captain Vernon neither expected nor desired an answer and that what he had to say would be said in his own good time.

"Had I been a cowardly hound," Captain Vernon went on, "who would have accepted the world's kicks as a recompense for its attention, I might have held my head as high to-day as any of them! Had I not been bold in nature, and careless of its friendship or its anger, it would have rewarded me with its smiles. When I speak of the world I mean that portion of mankind which affects to crush a man's spirit to its will and bring him to the level

of its law. Men call it society; I call it despotism. Men call it public opinion; I call it the tyranny of the few against the many. Because I scorned this assumption of authority, because I fought it and defied it, it has persecuted me, and to-day I am hunted down!"

Listening to him, the old man, in the Captain's last words—"to-day I am hunted down!"—recalled the language that he had heard him use when he had first spoken of what he called "the world." On that occasion he had said: "They have done their worst with me; if they could, they would hunt me down!" Looking at him and listening to these denunciations, he could see him, sending his thoughts back to the past, waging war with the object of his hatred. He could see that passionate nature of his revolting against the edict of the world's opinion, inflicting misery, and, it may have been, death, upon his fellow-man. In this new thought, springing to birth as his companion charged society with its persecutions of him, he saw even more than this. He saw Captain Vernon, pursued by the memory of crime, and under the ban of outlawry, seeking refuge under an assumed name in the home of his infancy—seeking shelter there and heaping the world with reproaches for what had come to him, the result of his own cruel disregard of law.

With this comprehension of Captain Vernon's meaning when he declared that he was hunted down, Blacker was at no loss to understand his next remark.

"What I have been writing here," the Captain pursued, "is a memorial addressed to a man in authority. If I should send it to him do you think he will look upon it favorably, or will he put the bloodhounds on my track?"

"If it be consistent with his duty to heed it I am sure he will do so. If it be inconsistent with that duty for him to grant what you ask there, do not, if you have any reason

to fear refusal, venture on the step you propose—do not send it to him.”

Blacker's belief that there was some event hidden from him in the story of Captain Vernon's life led him to utter the warning to him. He did not wish his companion to suppose that he suspected him of being a fugitive; but if, by giving him proper counsel, it were in his power to protect him against the commission of any rash action, his sense of what was due to their relations urged him to give the warning.

“When you told me on my arrival here a week ago that Mr. Arncliffe was an influential man,” resumed Captain Vernon, continuing the conversation, “I had hopes through the knowledge I possess to compel him to assist me with that influence. When I saw Mrs. Arncliffe, however, I could not consent to do aught to bring sorrow to her. For, should I make her husband aware of this knowledge and thus induce him to assist me toward furthering my ends, I might gain my desire; but he would perhaps upbraid her and she would suffer from his proud anger. No, Blacker, bad as I may be, I could not have done that. I cannot wage war against her. No, Blacker, never against her.”

With the angry look fading out on his face, he paused for a moment, and then went on.

“When I became aware of the state in which Mr. Arncliffe lived, and when I thought she would have it in her power to assist me, I had determined to allow no false sentiment to deter me from making the demand upon her. I had resolved that she should urge her husband to befriend me. But when I looked upon her in the parlor of Framleigh; when I saw that hers was not a nature to treat even the miserable and utterly forsaken outcast with contumely; when I saw, above all, that though I should injure her she would not seek to destroy me, as the world has sought to

I forgot the errand that had taken me to her presence, I left her with an altered purpose—a purpose never to that which should grieve her; a purpose to shield her from all evil.”

Patiently listening to him, the old man pondered over the meaning of his words. He had no fear, now, that Captain Vernon would carry out the threat he had spoken on the night of his arrival in Alderley. But with the passing away of this fear had come another—not for any danger that might accrue to the woman whose happiness was so dear to him, but for a danger that might menace the Captain himself.

In a helpless way, whilst Captain Vernon was speaking, he indulged in self-questionings as to what that unknown letter in his companion's life would tend to. For what purpose did he desire the exercise of Mr. Arncliffe's influence? If he were innocent of crime why should he petition for an act of influence, and through him the Government? He knew Captain Vernon's nature too well to suppose that he would ever confide to another—unless he expected to be benefited by the confidence—whatever there was in the history of his past which it was necessary to conceal; and as he looked back on what he knew of the early life of the disreputable man before him he trembled to think of what many years that intervened, since their last parting, might reveal. When Captain Vernon had written to him from India, two months before, that he was about to return to England, it was the first intimation he had had of his existence for many months. In that parting which had been between them—Captain Vernon in the East Indian army, at that time, and later on the Continent, Blacker in England—he had at intervals received brief letters, generally taken up with inquiries concerning Mrs. Arncliffe—whether she were married yet, whether there were any

probability of her soon marrying, and questions of a similar character. Through the address agreed upon between them at the time of their separation, Captain Vernon's letters always reached their destination, notwithstanding Blacker's change of residence; and thus the old man was kept informed as to his movements. But as these letters never made mention of the Captain's private affairs, Blacker was ignorant upon the subject of his mode of life abroad.

Thus dwelling, with no clue to the truth, upon his companion's past, and upon the possibility of some peril to him being connected therewith, he sought no more to solve the mystery.

Whilst Blacker was thus given over to thought, Captain Vernon was busily gathering together the pages on the table and folding them carefully. When this was completed he rose and walked with them to the fireplace. He stood looking at the bright flames with an irresolute air, as if uncertain what next to do.

He finally spoke to his companion.

"Blacker, what should I do with this memorial? Shall I send it to Mr. Arncliffe, or shall I throw it into the fire?"

Still reverting to that possible danger which might threaten him with betrayal in case he made himself known to others, Blacker responded: "Throw it into the fire and destroy it. Perhaps that will be the better course."

"Very well. The time has not come when action would be necessary. When that time shall come I will act." Saying which, he laid the package upon the fire and leaned against the mantelpiece, watching it until the place it had occupied was empty. Then, with his hands clasped behind him, with no apparent remembrance of Blacker's presence, and with the frowning look that was never absent from his face, save when speaking of Mrs. Arncliffe, he walked the room.

Thus walking for a long time, he spoke to the old man without looking at him.

“This is a hard world, Blacker—a cruel, heartless world. When a man has committed errors, or has been the victim of unfortunate circumstances, he may as well hang himself as make an attempt to reform. Because a man has been guilty once he is always guilty. Because a man is not willing to submit to imposition and insult he is a criminal and must be hunted down. I say, hunted down! Hunted down by law! Hunted down by public opinion! Hunted down by society! He must lurk in by-ways to avoid his pursuers! He must assume a hundred disguises if he would save himself from the indignities his enemies would put upon him; and if he should wish to reform, and should seek to reform, they come upon him and drive him back to the crime from which he is fleeing. That is the kind of world I have found it, Blacker.

A terrible thing, Blacker thought, that one so young should have reached that degree of hatred of his fellow-man! A terrible reflection that his life should have been so warped from the beginning!

“You pronounce judgment upon the world, Arthur, for its conduct,” said the old man, “but is it always wrong? Many have deserved its censure. I, for one, have deserved it.” He passed his hand across his brow in his old way as if to shut out from his mind something that caused him pain. He was thinking of the past and of the unfulfilled duties that were gone with it, and of what might have been had those duties been fulfilled.

Captain Vernon went on speaking.

“What do you know of the world’s malice? What do you know of its persecutions? Your wrong was kept from its knowledge and was beyond its reach; and so you have outlived the memory of it. But when a man is forced by

taunts and jeers to punish one of its members does society forget him then? No! It pursues him and crushes him because it has the strength to do so. It has been in a conspiracy against one man for ten years and I am that man."

Pausing for a little while in his speech, he strode from the window to the opposite wall in silence. Then he went on speaking in the apologetic way which he sometimes used, as if addressing himself in extenuation of what he had done.

"When my mother died—and looking back at what my life has been I know now that she was my only friend—and left me without a guide or adviser, what was bad in my nature strengthened as I grew older and I forgot what she had taught me—almost forgot, like an ungrateful wretch, the sacrifices that she made for me. Had I met in those days some woman whom I could have loved—I mean some pure woman who could have conquered the evil in me by the good in her, I might then have been rescued from the fate that followed me. But I met no such woman. Women I saw by the score; but what I saw of them repelled me. With passion and self-will in my own heart, did I need to have them reproduced in another? Would it have benefited me to continue the struggle commenced with the world outside at my own threshold? It was enough that men should thwart me in every way. But I could never have submitted to a woman's goadings."

Speaking thus, was there no one woman in all the world of whom he thought—one woman who, had not the current of her life set against him and her, might have been with him then, leading him to a happier future and devoting his life to a noble purpose? Or did he think of her as praying amid her tears to be delivered from the sin of loving him?

If his face were an index to his thoughts, no such picture

dwelt in his mind. In his mad disbelief in the presence of any good in his fellow-man, and in his equally mad conviction that what he had suffered and the sins he had committed were alike traceable to the world's enmity, he had no thought beyond that which his words indicated. He was summing up the debt he owed the world; but he took no reproaches to himself in doing so. Had he erred, the fault was not his. Had he thrown away his life in the pursuit of ignoble, and it may be criminal, ends, let the world answer for it—not him. So thinking, he went on in his self-justification.

“What was one life among all the rest that it should be pursued as mine was? What was there in me to array men against me? Was it physical strength that they envied? or was it because I would never truckle to them—because I held them aloof and scorned them? In all this life, which has been but a dreary blank, I have had no friend. In all these years which have had more of shadow than sunshine in them, I have breasted my way like a strong swimmer struggling against the tide and no friendly hand has been held out to save. As it has been from the beginning so will it be to the end. Like a beast of the forest I have been tracked from spot to spot and I feel that some day the hunters will get the better of me.” He paused in his walk and stood before the fire and gazed musingly into it with arms folded across his breast.

Blacker, as was his custom, had refrained from breaking in upon his soliloquy whilst the passion was upon him. But when he saw that he had yielded to a softer feeling and when his manner indicated that he would listen to him quietly he ventured to speak to him.

“Had you never left your old home, Arthur,” he said, “you might have been happier. Away from the turmoil that comes with association with the great, moving world,

you might have passed your life in quiet and content." He did not care to say to him that had he been less passionate and more considerate of the feelings of others he would never have been at war with society. He knew that it would be useless to reason with him and that the belief he held that men had singled him out for persecution was too strong to be removed by words.

Still gazing into the fire, the Captain murmured, "Yes, it might have been better for me. I might then have known the woman who would have been to me what my mother was."

Changed in voice and manner he sought his seat again. In the brief moment he had given to thought he had recalled the face of a girl familiar in his boyhood; the face that had become more womanly with years until his life was bound up in its blue eyes and pale cheeks; the face of the only woman who might have preserved him—the only woman whom he had ever loved.

There was no movement in him, and he seemed to have forgotten his old enemy in the calmer thoughts that had come over him. Strange enough, that, as he sat thus recalling the past and seeking to read the future, in that same hour, in the darkened drawing-room of Framleigh, Mrs. Arncliffe was thinking of what had been and of what was to be.

When Blacker perceived that Captain Vernon had fallen into this abstracted mood he left him quietly and sought his own room. Once there, he sat himself down with his box before him and took out his treasures, one by one, examining them as he had done before. During his visit of the morning he had taken a flower from the vase upon the mantelpiece and this he folded between the pages of a book and carefully put away with the rest.

And so the evening wore away, bringing with it the slow

approach of night. Blacker in his room counting his treasures—Captain Vernon pondering, in his reverie, upon his life and what had come of it. The sun which had filled his allotted course and had left the shadows creeping around Mrs. Arncliffe, stared for a while at him through the windows of the room in which he sat, and then left him, too, with the dusk gathering about him. Gradually with that waning light he faded into the gloom and became a part of it, and, but for the red glow of the fire betraying his presence, it might have seemed that with the passing away of the cheerful sunshine he had become involved in the ever-present mystery of the house itself.

When the utter darkness was on the earth and in the sky he felt his way slowly down the stairs and went into the street. The dust did not fall from the lion's head as the door closed after him, for it was shut as softly as if it led into a sick man's chamber. The silence of the street was unbroken as he walked away save by the sound of his footsteps upon the pavement. With eyes looking before him; with the occasional lamps bringing his figure into relief as he walked under them; with the night hanging about him when he had passed beyond their range; he went on and on until the town was at his back and the open fields lay in front of him. Where was he going, the one restless thing abroad, with no companionship but his own uneasy thoughts? What mission called him at that hour from the house in Balfour-street to wander alone in the darkness? What voice, speaking to his heart, had come with his passion's lull urging him to walk and walk?

Still hastening on, always with that earnest look directed to what was before him, he crossed the fields and struck into the highway. He had no need of a guide as he strode between the hedges skirting the road, for every foot of it was measured in his heart.

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It was the road that led to Framleigh.

Behind him glimmered the lights of the town, twinkling in windows and from the lamps of the streets. Before him in the vast distance the horizon glared like a red dawn. In the silence, before unbroken save by his footsteps, there came gradually a low murmur that connected itself in his mind with the red hue of the sky. For afar off—not so far but that its presence was perceptible in the night—sprawling for miles, burdening the earth with its weight of bricks and mortar and its masses of surging humanity, lay London. And the glare that he beheld was the reflex of the day that rose nightly within it and the murmur that came to his ears was its hoarse protest going heavenward forever.

With the town lights disappearing one by one behind him and the flaming sky before him, he walked on. In a little while he stood in front of the park gates which guarded the road that led up to the flanking steps. He looked through the bars and his gaze fell upon one window of the great house lighted up with a subdued glow. Gazing at it his heart throbbed with a painful expectancy. Was it the window of *her* room? was she there? would he see her if only for a moment?

He tried the gate with his hand. It was unfastened and yielded slowly to the pressure upon it. The gate-keeper slept in his lodge and in that sleep heard no sound of the footstep scattering the gravel of the path as Captain Vernon walked toward the house. The statues as he passed them stared at him, and the murmur of the fountain fell upon his ear; but never heeding them he went on until he had reached the steps that led up to the front door.

As softly as he had walked along the gravelled road he moved to one side and stood with arms folded in the shadow of a tree. Then he looked up at the window.

One of the curtains was drawn aside and within range of

his vision, seated and bending over a table, was the figure of a woman whose hair shone under the influence of the light falling upon it as it had shone when the ray from the October sun tinged it with gold until it seemed like a halo to the old man watching her in the parlor.

Then from Captain Vernon, standing in the shadow and with his eyes fixed upon her, came one word—

“Bertha!”

What was she doing? He looked more closely. Writing: was that all? As he gazed at her he saw her bend her head above the table with her handkerchief to her face.

Captain Vernon knew the meaning of that movement. He knew that a grief was on her heart which found its speech in tears. Strong as he was; boldly as he had breasted and defied the world; scorning sentiment as he did; he trembled at the picture of that woman in tears.

His breath came faster and he leaned against the tree for support. What was it, he thought, that caused these tears? Was it anything that *his* strength, *his* will, the sacrifice of his life, if needs be, could remove?

But to his self-questioning came no answer from the earth or from the air; and in his ear droned the fountain and the murmur of the distant city.

Did he think how near he was to the thoughts of the woman who sat there writing and weeping as she wrote? Did she think how near he was to her as he stood watching her in the shadow of the night?

It was not the space that was between them that separated them. They were parted by a greater parting than eye could measure or tongue could tell. There was a more solemn barrier between them than oceans and mountains and rivers; and as Captain Vernon thought of how far removed he was from her he hid his face and murmured, “In all the world she alone could have made me a better

man. She is unhappy and I would have added to her tears. If I were not what I am, and she were not what she is, there might be hope for my sinful soul."

When he looked again the curtains were joined and the darkness gathered about him more heavily. There was no obstinacy about him then. There was no stubborn obstinacy rankling in his heart to deter him from asking heaven's blessing upon her. For, with no witness but the silent stars he knelt upon the leaves at his feet and prayed as he had prayed at his mother's side. And his prayer was that no act of his should cause her further grief and that he might forget that love which could only bring wretchedness to her and remorse to him.

Then through the night he went into the white highway and crossed the lonely fields and walked with echoing steps through the streets of the town until the house in Balfour-street was gained. And ever as he went swiftly through the intervening space the vision which had come with the shadows rested upon his mind.

For it was a vision of what his whole life had been. What *he* loved must be wretched. What *he* cared for must expiate that care in tears. And with the stars looking down upon him he smote his forehead angrily at the thought that his miserable destiny should still follow him and that the taint of sin should be allied to the only redeeming impulse of his life.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN VERNON BECOMES FOOD FOR THE CANNIBAL GOSSIPS.

THE sun that was October's—October now no more— has passed into the round of November. Three times since the night Captain Vernon walked abroad has it looked into the windows of the house in Balfour-street upon him, moving about the mouldy rooms and dusty passages, restlessly gazing through the falling leaves at the white walls of Framleigh, or sitting in silent reverie before the fire in the room in which he was born. Three times has it come and gone and left the earth to darkness with the shadows hanging heavily about the old house and wrapping it and the double mystery it contains in its protecting gloom.

There is that awful solemnity about the house, there is that wonderful appearance of unreality about it, that the hand-maiden whom Blacker had discovered in the asylum, and who does the work of the household, is impressed with the belief that through the agency of an elderly magician in every-day clothes—for so does Blacker seem to her—she has been transferred to fairy-land and that she is in consequence haunted. This condition of being apparently haunted is more firmly fixed in her mind from the fact that by a fortuitous chance she has discovered in an old chest in her room a number of musty volumes of an antiquated and spectral appearance, to the perusal of which she has devoted her spare hours with a palpitating heart and with uneasy glances cast at the corners of her chamber. These works being of a supernatural, not to say ghostly, nature,

and being replete moreover with apparitions and spiritual manifestations, and also with presentiments of death, are calculated to increase the awe with which she ministers to the necessities of her position, rather than to diminish it. Among the books thus read with a morbid and horror-begetting attention are the writings of the late Mrs. Radcliffe, *The Ghost*, *The Three Spaniards*, A highly interesting Account (contained in a pamphlet) of the True Facts in the case of *The Spectre that Appeared to an Old Woman in Nottingham*, *The Confession of an Executed Murderer as Narrated after his Death by his Spirit to his Jailer*; and also one-half (the rest being torn out) of the *Wonderful Presentiment of Death* entertained by the late Mr. John Bundy, together with a *Circumstantial Account of How he Died*; which account, as has been remarked, being mutilated by the absence of the latter half of the book, and Mr. Bundy being left on the last remaining page hale and hearty, as far removed from dissolution as possible and on the point of sitting down to dinner, a great deal of mental trouble is fastened upon the feeble mind of the young woman, caused by an intractable opinion she has formed of Mr. B. which presents that gentleman in a life-in-death condition, as eating his meals at regular hours and also as taking to his grave at cock-crow, with instructions to have the stable-door kept fastened and to shake him together at sunrise.

Involved in this mysterious existence, as sustained by the maid-of-all-work, is Captain Vernon. To her eyes he is more of a character in a fairy tale than a human man. Sometimes in arranging his room her hand would be idle and she would pause to look at him with a half-frightened, doubting expression. Possibly in her poor brain there comes at times a feeling of sympathy for what must seem to her a fixed melancholy on his part, and she exhibits it

in her earnest look. Captain Vernon one day turns suddenly and observes her so looking at him. He terrifies her by his fierce words and manner and asks her the cause of her curiosity; but perceiving that her tongue refuses to answer and that she shakes in every limb with fear, he speaks kindly to her and pats her on the head and says that he was but joking with her; and so brings her back to laughter mingled with her tears.

Mary Agnes (for such is her name, so handed over to Blacker, and under these appellations recorded on the books of the asylum—although Mary Agnes Tittermary by common usage among the inmates of the same, and Mary Agnes Tittermary in her own esteem) since her arrival at the old house rarely finds her way beyond the front door, and seldom learns more of the outside life of Alderley than may be acquired from casual visits to the dormer windows. She sometimes makes transitory dashes across the street in quest of cigars for Captain Vernon, and works her doubtful way around the hospitable wooden Mandarin standing in an inviting attitude and with a deadly smile upon his face in front of the shop of Mr. T. Creech, Tobacconist, opens the little glass door quickly and walks in, frequently at the imminent risk of upsetting that little man who, with his hands in his pockets and his mouth open, is usually to be discerned looking through the panes with a curious eye at the windows of the old house opposite, and blind to what is passing immediately beneath his nose.

On these occasions (as indeed on all occasions) Mary Agnes is shy and difficult of approach, making her demand for the cigars in urgent haste. In her brief visits to Mr. Creech's establishment she consumes her time in casting eager glances at the house and in looking timidly at the Mandarin, which, to her mind, is an unfortunate mortal, transfixed by a horrid spell and which will one day re-

cover from its enchantment and resume its natural condition. Much as the tobacconist would desire to speak to her during these visits concerning the mode of life in vogue in the old house, she is invariably adamant on the subject of delay and inarble as regards conversation. Her errand accomplished, she dashes across the street again and passes under the lion's head into the companionship of the mystery and the echoes which belong to the dark passages and quiet chambers wherein she leads her haunted life.

Silent as are its occupants on the affairs of the world around them, save on the one topic that is always on their minds, there has been among the good people of Alderley quite a conversational panic in regard to the house and its mysterious tenant.

Parties living at a distance have been informed of the arrival of the strange, stern man from foreign parts, and of his unusual reticence. When asked, How do they know that the gentleman is from foreign parts? the barber around the corner and the small tobacconist who lolls all day in the door-way of his little shop opposite the old house and watches for the dust to fall from the lion's head at the opening and the closing of the door, are apt to respond in various ways. The barber responds, on these occasions, that he looks "dark-like, like a furriner;" not that he would say the gentleman *is* a furriner, however, for he may be just as good as you or me, you know; but what he means is, that if the party living in the old house around the corner ain't from furrin parts, he—the barber—would like somebody for to step up and say so.

This opinion is received with respectful attention by the small assemblage of gossips who are sitting around the fire in the shop and feeling their chins, waiting to be shaved; for, from the fact that the barber had once been upon the Conti-

ment in the capacity, as he expresses it, of "gentleman's assistant," he has quite a celebrity in Alderley as being excellent authority upon all questions relative to foreign existence, such as explaining diplomatic snarls and Governmental differences, or deciding upon such vexatious questions as occasionally spring up when foreign subjects are mentioned.

Mr. Creech's opinion is to the effect that if the gentleman over the way be not a foreigner, he looks like one; and further, if the gentleman be not a foreigner, he uses foreign money any how. Because the money that he has sent over with which to buy cigars is French money, and to that he—Mr. Creech—can swear. This opinion being entirely non-committal, as it were, and meaning anything you please, is looked upon by the gossips as confirmatory of nothing; and the tobacconist is left, to what has become a habit with him now, namely, to watch the door of the old house over the way, and to wonder what mystery it conceals. Indeed, so strong has this habit grown upon him that he has been known to make answer, to inquiries as to the price of his wares, "two strange gentlemen and an old man;" and it is also recorded against him, that to a question as to whether he had a pipe, for sale, of a certain peculiar shape, he made the strange reply to the questioner, that he did not have one of the kind called for, but that he could let him have, in its stead, a tall Turk, with a scar upon his face, carrying a light walking-cane.

In consequence of these irrelevant answers his business has fallen off sadly of late, and beyond watching the door of the house in Balfour-street, he has little else to do.

But it is not to be supposed that the opinion that the uncommunicative man who has been seen only once or twice upon the streets of Alderley since his unheralded arrival, is, of necessity, a foreigner, is universally credited.

For there are others (and among them the proprietor of the livery stables is the chief) who believe, and assert, that, so far from being a foreigner, the gentleman is as good an Englishman as can be found out of London.

In support of this opinion his words to the proprietor are quoted and the hostler and groom are called upon to offer, in evidence, their recollection of the conversation that occurred on that occasion.

From this evidence, partly the result of cross-examination, and partly the result of private hints and suggestions on the part of the proprietor, it is apparent that, in the first place, the gentleman is a complete mystery; in the second place, that the gentleman is immensely rich (the testimony whereof being the money he had thrown to the groom); in the third place, that he is an intimate friend of the family at the Hall; in the fourth place, that he is a secret Agent of Government sent down to Alderley to transact business that essentially requires a secret agency; in the fifth place, that he is an open and avowed Agent of the Government who has come down to Alderley to regulate the ensuing borough election and to carry it in favor of the Government measures, and so on to the tenth place, which fully corroborates the first place, inasmuch as the proprietor of the stables, on being closely questioned, reluctantly avows that he don't know anything about him.

But it is not alone in the barber shop, or from the lips of the little tobacconist, nor is it from the select coterie that assembles at the stables, that the conjectures as to Captain Vernon's identity and his mission in Alderley proceed. They have been made the subject of serious consultation in the back parlor of the Knight and Dragon, and Joe Briggs, the landlord, has been heard to remark that the circumstances are substantially the same as occurred in that affair about which I told you, you know, where Tom Warlick, the

forger, after having managed to escape detection for ten years, was finally discovered hid away in an old house in London, so thin, gentlemen, so emanciated, to use the doctor's own words, that his own mother wouldn't aknowh him. As this story of the landlord's has been a chronic one with him for years, and as many of his hearers have viewed it, even in its most favorable light, as somewhat doubtful, this apparent substantiation of the truth of his story is triumphantly hailed by those who believe in the Warlick narrative as a clincher that must appall the most skeptical. This version meeting with great favor in the parlor of the Knight and Dragon, its success gives rise to various suggestions from various gentlemen who have become envious of the triumph achieved by the landlord.

Thus it is weakly put forward by a dyspeptic gentleman with a watery turn of eye, that perhaps Captain Vernon is a Conspirator. This view, at first, from its originality of thought and boldness of conception is received with much applause by the undecided; but it appearing, on inquiry, that the originator of the idea has lately been reading the life of Guy Fawkes, and that he has, on the whole, but a feeble idea of what goes to make up a Conspirator, and it appearing, furthermore, upon being interrogated on the point, that he can't well say what the unknown gentleman is to conspire against, you know, the fallacy, not to say absurdity, of the thing is so satisfactorily proven, that the miserable suggestion is treated with the derision it deserves and its wretched author is held up to the public ridicule. The impulse, however, given, by the favorable reception awarded to the Warlick theory, to the belief in the marvellous as connected with the Balfour-street mystery, leads to other suggestions more or less flimsy.

Thus, the gentleman might be a persecuted debtor, fleeing from his pursuing creditors and meditating suicide,

and doubtful as to which mode of death he should choose—poison or the pistol. Then again, he might be a lunatic escaped from some asylum, which theory does not lack friends until the originator offers the alternative, almost in the same breath, Or a Orthor, which, drawing from a gentleman present the comic remark that the difference between the two is so slight as not to be worth mentioning, the merits of the supposition are forgotten in the humorous episode. A few more suggestions to the effect that the party under discussion might be a individual disappointed in love, and with his 'eart suffering from the same—this from a long-haired young man, the coach factor's apprentice who, himself, is generally believed to have tender relations, in secret, with the landlord's daughter; that he might be a young man who has lavishly wasted his fortune, and ain't particular what becomes of him now; that he might be a Artist or a Poet, or something of that sort; are duly weighed and found wanting, partly because they do not partake sufficiently of the marvellous, and partly because the back parlor of the Knight and Dragon has made up its mind to accept the landlord's theory as the most probable, with the possible contingency, that the future might bring with it, of witnessing the lurking mystery dragged by the hair of the skull, in a state of skeleton, from the house in Balfour-street, and of hearing it ask, in a beseeching tone, if somebody wouldn't be good enough to fetch its left thigh-bone out of the closet, and if somebody else wouldn't be good enough to give its head one or two screws on the shoulder and make it a little tighter.

Thus, in the barber-shop, and on the street, and in the stables, and in the parlor of the Knight and Dragon, are the house in Balfour-street, and the man who inhabits it, discussed.

Alderley riots in the consequences of its own action, and

Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, becomes, by turns, a mysterious foreigner, a mysterious Englishman, a man with no special business at all, a man who has some special purpose in view, and, finally, a lurking criminal who hopes, by seclusion, to avoid the consequences of his crime. The warning given by Captain Vernon to Blacker, on the night of his arrival, that he should answer certain questions, if ever they should be put to him, as he directed him to answer, has had no influence in explaining his presence in Alderley; for Blacker has been as little on the street as the Captain himself, and the old man has few friends in the town to ask him questions. In addition to this, the gossips infinitely prefer that Captain Vernon and his intentions should be subjected to the ordeal of their own surmises, and they have, therefore, sedulously refrained from attempting to enlighten themselves upon the facts of the case.

In the matter of the old man, the gossips have become habituated to his presence and they attach no particular importance to him or to his history. He is generally considered (and here the various supporters of the various theories in regard to the Captain meet on common ground) to be a weak-minded party who is, in some way or other, mixed up with his stern seclusive companion; and the friends of the Warlick theory are even disposed to argue the point that in the eventuality, which they confidently anticipate, of the dragging forth of the mystery from the house in Balfour-street, the apparition of the old man will be seen following after, with tottering steps, and bewailing the unlucky destiny that has overtaken him and his companion.

This point, thus put forward by the party that controls public opinion in the back parlor of the inn, is calculated to provoke argument and to infringe, in a measure, upon

the justice of the ground assumed in the barber-shop and on the streets and in the stables. For it is clear to the commonest understanding to comprehend, that to acknowledge the possibility of the future occurrence of the eventuality set forth is to accept in full the Warlick theory as promulgated by the landlord of the Knight and Dragon inn; and as this is in almost direct opposition to the theories assumed by the parties of which the barber and the proprietor of the stables are the head, the shallow artifice is quickly detected, and the old man remains a debatable question upon which no definite opinion has been reached.

There is an obscure rumor, it is true, that the older man is the father of the younger, the mother being mentioned in the person of an Unfortunate who had fled from the town, years and years ago, with her misfortunes upon her head. This rumor, however, on being traced, is found to proceed from divers old mischief-makers who have indulged in this theory in confidential intercourse with their familiars over the sanctity of the tea-table; and it is even remarked by the oldest (and consequently the sharpest) of the party, that that creature (meaning the Unfortunate) my dear Mrs. Wraddles, had eggsactly the same eyes and nose and color of the hair which the strange gentleman (and a handsome gentleman he is, too) has, which I don't mean for to go for to say that the gentleman is her own son, and which we thought dead and come to life again after she ran away from Alderley when I was a young ooman then, and just before my first took cold and died like a Christian in his bed, God rest his soul, and which I remarked at the time to my first that if that gal wouldn't repent for the airs she gave herself on the accounts of her eyes, and the way she used to toss her head and shake her curls when she'd pass us in the street, you wouldn't actually believe, my dear ma'am, if I was to tell you now.

But this rumor with all its glaring inconsistencies is not adopted as the basis of anything, and it is left where it originated, in the circle that gave it birth.

And so does the world without go on.

So does the gossipy world deal with the house in Balfour-street and with the man who sits before the fire in long self-arguments. So through the days that fall into the dreary round of November is the world without busy with what concerns it not—busy in forecasting the future, and busy in explaining the present.

But could those who thus speak with idle tongues stand unaware in the gloom that shrouds the passages within and, holding their ears to the door of the room in which sits the object of their inquiring scrutiny, could they listen to him there as he speaks to himself and hear from his lips spring the language of a hopeless mind, they might go forth under the lion's head into the cheerful street wondering, indeed, with bated breath and pale faces, at the words to which they have listened.

For the voice that rises in that darkened chamber is a voice that protests against the hour that gave birth to the man who speaks and the words it utters are these:

“Let it come when it will. She is dead to me and I am dead to hope. Better that the ministers of death had sought me in my cradle than that I should have lived to be the wretch I am!”

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN VERNON CROSSES THE THRESHOLD OF FRAMLEIGH-PLACE ONCE MORE.

THE little tobacconist, leaning against the door of his shop over the way and sleeping at intervals during his watch, roused himself to become aware of the closing of the door of the house in Balfour-street, and to rejoice at the presence of Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, standing for a moment to look around him and then walking down the street.

The proprietor of the stables, dozing in the sun, and essaying to resolve, in a sort of philosophical dream, the mystery that had brought trouble and dissension in the quiet circle of Alderley life, awoke as the shadow of Captain Vernon fell upon him, and rubbed his eyes and sharpened his faculties as the Captain addressed him.

"Is Black Dick engaged to-day?"

"No, sir, not engaged to-day. He is in the stable."

"Then let me have him as quickly as you can get him ready."

"In harness, sir?"

The Captain answered, No: that he wished to try Black Dick in the saddle; and the proprietor walked away to attend to the saddling of the horse. The Captain, lounging at the entrance of the stables and twirling his moustache, waited until the horse should be brought to him. Those who passed along the street, and who recognized in him the bone of contention that had arrayed the gossips of Alderley in bitter feud, stared at him in a feeble sort of way

as if they might read the riddle that was on everybody's tongue, and which never found its answer, by looking into his inscrutable face. But when they saw that the stare was returned, and when they saw the frown gathering upon the Captain's brow, they compromised the matter by gazing beyond him, standing in the entrance, and became abstractedly interested in the mysteries that the gloom of the stables shrouded.

The Captain noticed these peculiarities of the good people as they passed him and smiled grimly. He may have thought, as he observed them, that they were the natural continuation of that old persecution that the world had levelled against him, and he may have felt his hatred against his fellows spring up in his heart; for when the groom approached him leading Black Dick by the bridle, he said to him, "Why do these people stare so at a man? Are they fools or idlers, or what are they?" The groom, touching his cap, said he didn't know; but may-be they looked at him because they were wondering who he was.

"Wondering who I am!" ejaculated the Captain, fiercely. "Is it their business to know who I am? Is a man to go about the streets telling his business to every inquisitive fool whom he meets? They talk about me in Alderley, do they not?" He fixed his eye with a menacing look upon the man whom he was addressing and cut the air nervously with his riding-whip. During the colloquy the proprietor of the stables had come up with the laudable desire of gaining some information concerning the Captain's identity wherewith to silence all opposition in the barber-shop and in the parlor of the Knight and Dragon. He therefore hastened to answer the Captain's last question.

"Bless your heart, sir, they don't talk about nothing else! If you was the Sultan of Turkey on a wisit, or if you was her Majesty's own son, which he ain't old enough to travel

yet, and more's the pity, they couldn't talk more about you."

"Ah?" And the riding-whip lashed the air with a vengeful fury. The proprietor went on with a reckless garrulity.

"When I hear 'em a-talking and a-saying as how you might be this, that, and the other, wot do I say?"

He looked at the Captain with an argumentative eye, and at the groom with a warning expression.

"Wot do I say?" he repeated.

"Well, and what *do* you say?" asked the Captain, a little sneeringly, looking down on him and waiting for his answer. The proprietor of the stables having impressed the groom with the necessity of preserving silence as to what he does say under those circumstances, goes on to say what he says.

"When I hear 'em a-talking in that way, I says, 'a man's a man, ain't he'? And when one of 'em says to me, 'Yes, but what sort of a man is a man when he is a man,' I says, 'Stop, my friend, if the gen'man wot lives in the old house has got his reasons for holding his tongue, which none of us ain't without our little secrets, you know, it ain't none of our concerns if that 'ere gen'man should go for to shut himself up in the house a-thinking about the Lord knows what.' When I says that, they says to me, 'True for you, Chivers, and that's wot we say, too.'

The Captain's whip was performing its evolutions in the air during these remarks, and his hand grasped the handle more tightly. In its airy flight it had once or twice approached the proprietor's head, and the latter whilst speaking had divided his attention between it and the eye of the man who held it.

The argumentative smile with which Mr. Chivers had hitherto illumined his countenance had died away, before

the Captain spoke again. There was a sneer upon the Captain's lip as he spoke, which operated uncomfortably upon the proprietor's nerves, and he coughed apologetically as the Captain turned toward him and said, "If a man were to ask you about me and wonder what I do here, what would you tell him?"

"I'd tell him, which Sanders here'll tell you the same, I didn't know, which I'd be a-shaming of the devil and telling of the truth if I did."

"And if I were to tell you what to answer can you remember it?"

Mr. Chivers replied with alacrity that he thought he might remember it, and, if he did not, Sanders would. On being appealed to, Sanders, too, thought he would remember. The whip came down with a sharp, cracking sound, as the Captain looked, first at the proprietor and then at the groom.

"If any man should ask either of you my business here," he said, "tell him to come to me, and I will tell him what that business is. Do you think you will remember that?"

Mr. Chivers smiled feebly and remarked that it wouldn't be much to remember, especially as the gentleman asked him to bear it in mind. The groom also, with a vacant look at his employer, thought a child might recollect what the gentleman had said.

And then Captain Vernon mounted Black Dick and rode away. Rode away, leaving the proprietor of the stables and the groom staring at each other, and no wiser than before. Rode away to frown at the idlers who looked up at him from door-stoop and shop-windows as he passed them—idlers, who were remarking, that there goes the strange gentleman now, and who were droning over the old mystery which followed him into the house in Balfour-street and came out with him when he went into the pub-

lic places. Rode away to leave the gossips behind him, and to follow the highway that led to London, until he stood before the great park-gates of Framleigh-Place, waiting for the laggard gate-keeper to emerge from his lodge and to let him in.

He gazed for a moment beyond the trees and saw the white columns of the portico gleaming through the rifts the autumnal winds had left in the branches. The statues, too, rose up from their pedestals of dead leaves and some of them looked at him and beckoned him on with a smile upon their marble faces, whilst others were pointing with a hostile finger warning him away. But nowhere could he hear the murmur of the fountain. He looked toward it, but the glancing spray was wanting in the air, and the carved shaft rose with no voice of babbling waters issuing from it. To his ears came only the sound of the November wind among the branches, and the rustle of the crisp leaves beneath his horse's feet, as he rode toward the house.

The rein had fallen upon Black Dick's neck and Captain Vernon had forgotten to resume his hold upon it. For the horse was not thought of in that moment, and in his mind dwelt the picture that the shadows had brought with them—the picture of the woman who sat at the window and wrote in the dead hour of night, with her tears falling upon the paper as she wrote.

Whatever passion may have existed in Captain Vernon's heart on the ride from Alderley was wanting there as this vision rose before him. Whatever old feeling had been revived in his heart, when he met the idle looks of the people in the streets of Alderley, had passed away. Whatever hatred lived there against all that bore his shape slept in peace as he walked up the marble steps and into the drawing-room to wait until Mrs. Arncliffe should come down.

The card (brought with trembling eagerness by the

ous Victim) which announced the fact that Captain Vernon was below, found Mrs. Arncliffe seated by window, with a book in her lap, and looking out upon sky and watching the falling leaves. The delicate was buried in the fair hair as she leaned her head it, and the blue eyes were misty with the guest that October sun had brought with it and which the November sun had retained. The tears that had come on the that she had written to Mrs. Archibald, and when sales had fallen from her eyes and she became aware it shadow, darker than death, which had risen before her and Mr. Arncliffe, rarely left her eyes now, and she sat at the window thinking of what might have the book lay idly in her lap and her thoughts wandered back to the days of her girlhood—the passionate that had abided with hope—the golden days that had happy with the dreams of a future love.

message that Captain Vernon awaited her presence and her. For a little while she hesitated as to the what should be given to the visitor. If she should to see him, saying that she was unwell, would he strangely of it? Would he remember her embarrassment on the first day of their meeting, and would he as her determination to any feeling connected with that embarrassment, and of which her manner then had been unwilling evidence? In the wild fancies of his bold (for she knew his nature perfectly now), would he that she refrained from meeting him for fear of being the feeling he had aroused in her heart? At this point she determined to receive him. She would steel herself against a betrayal of the love that had become a part of her life. She would receive him as she would a martyr, and, in thus immolating herself, she would expiate wrong she had committed in ever loving him.

The Victim, awaiting her decision, received his orders to tell Captain Vernon that she would be in the parlor soon and disappeared. Standing before the mirror she looked at her face for a long time in silence.

"Will this face betray me?" she murmured. "Can I ever forget, in his presence, what he is to me, and how much I love him? Will this coward face betray me with the blush or the paleness upon its cheek?"

As she asked herself this question, her eyes swam in a greater mist and she leaned her head upon her hand and wept; for her mind was busy with reading the future, and she saw the shadow between herself and Mr. Arncliffe growing darker and darker as the days should wear on. But the thought of Captain Vernon awaiting her in the parlor and wondering at her delay strengthened her in the task of forgetting that of which it was useless then to think, and she went down to meet the man whom, of all men in the world, she most dreaded and most desired to see.

When she entered the drawing-room she stood for a moment, silently, to gaze at him. He had not heard her enter and he was standing at the window, looking out contemplatively at the statue whereof the marble finger had warned him away—looking out at that, and at the voiceless fountain, and at the picture of the dying year. In that brief moment she could see him, as Blacker had spoken of him, as the worst enemy of those who cared for him. In the darkness that had fallen upon her life, she could see him—the man whom she loved—as her worst enemy; for, in loving him, she walked in a shadow that had no future of light and with no hope of a brighter day.

Captain Vernon was still standing at the window when she moved toward him. She hesitated for a moment, not knowing what to say to make him aware of her presence.

Then she broke the silence and said to him, "I trust I have not kept you waiting, Captain Vernon."

The gentle voice falling upon his ear recalled him to himself, and he turned quickly. The sudden eagerness with which he looked at her, the strange light that came into his eye, and which softened the harshness of his bronzed face as he looked, startled her; and to her cheek came the old blush, which, in the first hour of their meeting, had flushed her face with its babbling testimony.

Where was the strength, for which she had prayed, to meet him with unconcern? Where was the resolve she had framed through days and nights of tears and anguish—the resolve that, come what would, she would never betray herself to his eyes; never give him reason to suspect the existence of the love which had brought with it dust and ashes? Gone, in that moment, as though it had never existed. Gone, as had gone the dreams of her maidenhood and the quiet of her life, before a single look from the eyes in which alone, of all eyes in the world, she saw beauty—the eyes that were gentle only when bent upon her!

When Captain Vernon turned and saw her standing near him, he said to her, "I was not aware, Mrs. Arncliffe, that you had entered the room. Forgive me for my inattention."

Then he placed a seat for her before the fire and sat down beside her. She held in her hand a small fire-screen and with this she concealed her face from his look. So, shutting out his features from her sight, she patiently listened until he should speak to her.

His first words were, "Does the fire affect your eyes, Mrs. Arncliffe, that you conceal them from me? Pardon me, but in exchanging their light for the light of the fire I am the loser."

Was he uttering a compliment? She looked beyond the screen for a moment and her gaze rested upon his face. Upon her cheek burned the crimson tide that had rushed there when he had spoken, and in her eyes lingered the mist that had blurred them when she sat by the window of her room an hour before.

Only for an instant did she look, and then the screen did its office as she murmured, "Captain Vernon is very good to speak as he does. But I cannot believe that he is entirely in earnest in what he says."

As he listened to her, into his heart came a passionate longing to reveal his feelings. But he conquered the impulse that impelled him to declare the love that had come, so late, to master him; for a fear crept over him that, if he should speak to her upon that forbidden theme, she would rise and leave him in anger and never see him more. Better, he thought, to let the love that dwelt in his breast consume him with its unshared strength than that he should add to the tears that had already fallen from her eyes, or that he should be doomed to her anger and hate by an avowal of it. It was something to be near her; it was something to forget in the holiness of her presence the sins and failings of his life. When with her, the world was forgotten and the angry passions of his nature slept. Should he risk all, then, by betraying himself? No; let it pass, and, with it, the one thought of his life that could never find utterance, save to bring grief to her and self-reproach to him.

So thought he in the moment that had elapsed after Mrs. Arncliffe had ceased speaking. In the brief look that she had given him he had noticed the heightened color upon her face, but he ascribed it to the heat of the fire falling upon her, and he did not, therefore, attach any importance to it or connect it, in his mind, with his words.

Mrs. Arncliffe broke the silence. "A few days ago," she said, "you sent a gentleman to apologize to me for your failure to call upon me. Who was your friend, Captain Vernon?"

He had not expected this, but he hastened to answer. "He was an old friend of my father and my mother during their life. His presence was no intrusion, I hope."

"Oh, no, I liked him. Why did you not bring him with you? There seemed to be a secret sorrow resting upon him and I sympathized with him. I thought that he was unhappy."

With the screen before her face she could not see Captain Vernon. There was a strange look upon him that would have startled her. It was not a look of passion. It was an expression of doubt mingled with remorse—remorse for the sorrows he had brought to the old man of whom she was speaking.

"I am glad, Mrs. Arncliffe, that you liked him. He has many sorrows; but I cannot speak of them now. If you have any sympathy for an old man who is unhappy, give it all to him. If you can have any love for one who has none to care for him, who walks alone with his great grief about him, forget that you do not know him, and forget that he is a stranger to you, and give that love to him!"

He spoke eagerly. He pleaded for Blacker, that she would love him, as if he had been pleading for himself, and his words fell upon her ear with a strange meaning. What mystery was there about his friend that called for her love and sympathy? Why was he so eager to enlist her feelings in behalf of his friend?

There was no oracle to solve his language to her comprehension. The mystery that shrouded the house in Balfour-street, and which had distracted Alderley and had rent it into angry factions, began to envelope her in its folds, and

she was thenceforth to walk with it until the time when that mystery should be made plain to every mind.

Under the shelter of the screen Mrs. Arncliffe thought of these things. Whilst she could not understand Captain Vernon's meaning, she could at least understand his desire. If he wished her to care for one for whom he cared, it would be more than a duty with her to do so—it would be a pleasure. And then there came to her the recollection of what the old man for whom Captain Vernon was pleading had said to her in speaking of the Captain—that he was the worst enemy of those who cared for him. Had he ever been the old man's enemy, and did he wish to expiate his wrong by enlisting her sympathy in his sorrows?

The mystery was there, but she could not read it; and so she simply answered, "I will give my sympathy to the unhappy wherever I find them. If your friend has none to love him, and if he be worthy of the love I could give him, I would give it to him with my sympathy. I would give it to him in charity, and as a daughter would give her love to her father whom she has never known."

Her head was bent upon her bosom and the hand that held the screen had fallen into her lap. That unknown chapter in her own life, which concealed the secret that Mrs. Archibald had promised to reveal one day to her, was uppermost in her thoughts, and she connected, she knew not why, the old man's story with her own. There was no voice to whisper to her that the man who sat beside her and pleaded for his friend was aware of this secret, and the past—with all that it contained of dead resolves against her on the part of Captain Vernon—resolves that, had they been fulfilled, would have brought the knowledge with them that was unknown then—was happily sealed to her.

"Yes, Mrs. Arncliffe," said Captain Vernon, as eagerly

as before, "if you should love him as a daughter does who loves a father, you will love him as he would be loved. For the grief that makes him seem an older man than he is has connection with an affection which has been dead to him for years. If you can have sympathy for him for this, and if you can give him that love which has been denied to him for these years, it will indeed be a charity."

Still lost in thought, she did not interrupt Captain Vernon who went on speaking rapidly. He was evoking from the past the dead records it contained, and his mind was dwelling on his own disregard of the charity he held up to Mrs. Arncliffe.

"When I sent my friend to bear my excuses to you for my failure to call upon you, I did so that he might speak to you and see you. You may think this avowal a strange one, Mrs. Arncliffe, and it would be so but for this, that my friend had told me you were the friend and protector of those who needed friends and protectors and that the poor were never turned away from your door empty-handed. I thought when I sent him here you would extend the same sympathy to him that you have extended to others—that you would pity him and care for him as I do."

He rose from his chair and stood by the mantel-piece. In the sudden interest, indicated by his words, that he manifested in her opinion of his friend, he had parted with the restraints society imposed upon his conduct and had yielded to his natural impulses which led him into his old disregard of the world's formalities.

Mrs. Arncliffe looked up at him timidly as he stood leaning upon his arm. She did not attempt to weave theories as to his meaning in urging the old man's cause. She accepted his words as a part of that strange nature which marked him out to be his own enemy, and, in the love that

she bore him, the days that had elapsed since she had known him seemed years and he and his manners had grown as familiar to her as though he had been the companion of her childhood.

With this brief interval of silence he went on in a justification of the old man against a nameless false friend.

“When I speak of him as unknown to a love that has been dead to him for years, I do not wish you to understand, Mrs. Arncliffe, that he is entirely guilty if that love has ever left his side in the person of her who should have been with him. If he has had reason to sorrow, it is because there was one with him whom ill-fortune has followed in every venture of his life—one who has been reckless until it is too late to be good and who has blasted every hope that has been placed in him. It was by his advice that my friend allowed his happiness to be cast away, until time has changed fortunes and that happiness is almost beyond his reach!”

Whatever might be the sorrow under which his friend labored, she could well enough understand, now, who was the one to whom he referred as having led him astray. She closed her eyes to shut him out, standing before her, but she could not efface from her mind that other picture which her thoughts presented to her, of Captain Vernon, at some future day, casting a shadow upon her life as he had ruined every hope that had been placed in him. But when he paused she said, gently, “If it has been a long grief to him, when it shall be removed—if it should ever be removed—his happiness will be greater because of his sufferings. When that day shall come—if it ever should come—I will rejoice to think that your friend is happier, Captain Vernon. Will you tell him this for me?”

“I will tell him this, Mrs. Arncliffe, and that his

sufferings have excited your sympathy. He will thank you, as I thank you now in his name."

"And say to him, that if some day he should come to visit me, I would be happy to see him again. Tell him that what poor comfort lies in my sympathy I freely give him."

She said this partly because she knew that Captain Vernon would be pleased with it, and partly because her inclinations led her to say it. She remembered the feeble old man with pity, and she had learned to look kindly on those whose lives were burdened with an unspoken grief.

"When I go back to Alderley I will tell my friend this, and he will come to see you as you wish. You will remember what you have promised me, and you will be a daughter to him in love, will you not, Mrs. Arncliffe?"

"Yes, if my love can be of any avail, and if any words of mine, uttered in kindness, could serve to remind him of something that might have been, it is not much for me to give that love and to speak those words; and if, by any act of mine, I can lead him to forget for a while what oppresses him, I will do so."

The gentle nature that had brought content to the hearts of the poor of Alderley, and which had cheered the weary wayfarer by the exercise of its goodness, spoke in those words; and as Captain Vernon listened to them, his heart smote him that in other days he had meditated wrong against the woman who uttered them.

Whilst she was speaking Captain Vernon resumed his seat. Her eyes were fixed upon the carpet, but she knew that he was observing her closely. His manner throughout the interview had been too earnest to escape her notice, but she referred this to the interest he felt in his friend and not to any feeling that might concern himself alone. Had it been otherwise, she might have suspected that some other

feeling prompted his words. But no; the time had not come yet when the mad passion that lurked in his heart was to be expressed in speech; and the future, and what it was to bring with it, carried a blessing with it in the ignorance with which her mind looked forward to it.

From where Captain Vernon sat he could see the portrait of Mr. Arncliffe, and, as his eyes fell upon it, he thought of him as busy with what concerned Government and neglecting his young wife.

"When do you expect the return of Mr. Arncliffe?" he said, turning from the contemplation of the portrait.

"I do not know when Mr. Arncliffe will return to Framleigh. He may be here in a week, and he may not be here for a month."

"Is he much engaged?"

"Yes, I believe so, Captain Vernon. He writes to me that his affairs will not allow him to leave at present, but that, possibly, he may come down toward the end of this month."

She spoke wearily as if she felt no interest in what she was saying. Captain Vernon, twirling his moustache, observed this, and went on.

"In the long days that you pass here in loneliness—pardon me if I am too bold—do you not sometimes wish for a change to relieve the monotony of your present life? Do you never think of other scenes? For, if I mistake not, you can take but little pleasure in the idle visits of your friends in society."

"I remain here because Mr. Arncliffe wishes it. If I were to follow my inclinations I would not remain at Framleigh during his absence. Society has few charms for me beyond the knowledge that, in receiving the visits of acquaintances, I fulfil one of the duties we all owe to each other."

As she spoke Captain Vernon smiled a bitter smile.

"In the circle in which you move, Mrs. Arncliffe," he said, "and in the goodness of your life, you are spared the wrongs with which men and women curse each other. You are spared the misery that springs from the world's persecution of one whom it hates, and you accept its smiles as real and its good wishes as the promptings of its heart."

Looking away from him, she made no answer. She knew that his misanthropy arose from that perverted phase of his nature which distorted life in his eyes until it became simply a channel for abuse and persecution on the part of the many against the few.

"You can have no cause to regret your life and what has come of it," Captain Vernon resumed. "Because you were good you have been happy. If justice has been done to your worth, and if you are loved, as you deserve to be, for the good you have done to others, you have been happily exempt from the miserable fate the world reserves for what it envies—detraction and persecutions. Life has brought no shadows to mar your happiness, I trust, Mrs. Arncliffe?"

Her gaze wandered from the vacancy upon which it had been fixed and her eyes turned inquiringly upon his face. Why did he ask her that? she thought. Had he detected in her manner any evidence of what, so long as she lived, she prayed that God would give her strength to conceal?

His voice expressed the interest he felt in her answer and his eye looked the respectful sympathy it had shown when he had addressed her on the day of their first meeting. Her reply was uttered in a low tone and he bent toward her the better to hear it. "Life has brought its shadows to me as well as to the rest of the world, Captain Vernon. If I am not as happy as I should be, it is because



I am ungrateful and because I do not properly appreciate the blessings that God has shown to me.”

There was no clue in those words to permit him to read the mystery of Mrs. Arncliffe in tears at the window, when he stood apart in the night and watched her. Whatever grief was at her heart, she concealed it from him, he thought. And as he questioned himself, he felt with bitterness that, to him, it was right that her thoughts should be concealed. What was he to her that she should give him her confidence? Nothing. An acquaintance of a week, a man met by chance in a crowd, and whose presence was of as little account to her as was that of the traveller threading the maze of some far-off wilderness.

As this thought possessed him, the tender eyes looking with a dreamful persistency into the coals in the grate, and the delicate cheek, flushed with the heat of the fire falling upon it, became irksome to him. He felt, in his bitterness of heart, his hatred of the world grow stronger and stronger within him, and he cursed anew that spirit of ill, which, in his belief, followed him and which, even at the gate of that Paradise which his destiny had vouchsafed him, drove him forth to fall a prey to the evil passions of his nature.

With his face darkened by that angry thought, he rose to go. Mrs. Arncliffe, aroused by his movement, looked up at him, and the color that was upon her died away and left the paleness of death on her cheek as she looked. For she felt a strange belief that at some day, when those passions of his life should culminate in disgrace, and, it may be, crime, to him, she would not pass unscathed beneath the blow that was to blast him. That disgrace and that crime might come to him alone, but in his loss she would suffer as surely as if they had been her own. Oh! that she could speak to him as her woman's heart dictated! Oh! that she could warn him to beware of that reckless

disregard of all law which showed itself so plainly in his every action! But, no. The barrier that was between him and her prevented that; and she could only shrink before the betrayal of his nature, with no voice to warn him—no loving voice to cheer him in an endeavor to do what was right.

Standing beside her chair, Captain Vernon said to her abruptly, "If *you* are not happy, Mrs. Arncliffe—who deserve to be—you will understand me when I say that my life, too, has been the sport of fortune. If my words seem strange to you, and if I speak too boldly, perhaps, let this be my justification: that I see in you, and in your nature, the reflection of a good mother who died in the hope that her son would forget whatever had occurred to mould him to sin, and would live to be honored and respected. Let this thought justify me if I have said aught to-day to offend you."

She rose to speak to him; but even in that moment, with a quick salute, he had gone. She heard the great hall-door close after him, and through the window she could see him walking toward Black Dick, impatiently waiting his rider and beating the earth with his hoof.

In another moment he had mounted the horse and was galloping toward the gate. Would he look back? thought Mrs. Arncliffe. No! Through the gate and on the road to Alderley she saw him speed; and then the objects between them shut him from her sight and she turned away from the window to weep. To weep, not for herself—for her worse than useless love was forgotten in that moment—but for the man who had left her with a despairing speech upon his lips. To weep for that life which was thrown away in the pursuit of wrong ends and which had no gleam in its dark course save the memory of a mother who had died in the hope that her son would one day be hon-

ored and respected. To weep at the true knowledge of what was meant by Captain Vernon's oldest friend when he had said that he was his own enemy and the worst enemy of those who cared for him.

The entrance of the Victim aroused her from the lull into which she had fallen after her passion of tears had spent itself.

He bore in his hand the day's mail.

She looked at the letters, one by one. There was one from Mr. Arncliffe; but she laid that aside. She knew what that contained: the cold, formal expressions of respect that Mr. Philip Arncliffe usually wrote to Mrs. Bertha Arncliffe, his wife. There was one, also, from Lady Eden. A repetition of the invitation to Mrs. Arncliffe to spend the Christmas season with her at Eden Lodge. Then there were two or three little remembrances from the hawks, which, she knew, contained the usual amount of idle gossip and sharp animadversion. These, too, she laid aside with the others.

There was one letter left to examine. She was too familiar with the handwriting to mistake it. It was a bulky letter and was evidently in answer to the one she had written a few days before.

The letter was from Mrs. Archibald.

And then, with the recollection of all that Captain Vernon had said still strong upon her, she entered upon the perusal of those words which were to make her aware of that which, in her days of girlhood, her adopted mother had kept concealed from her—that unknown portion of her history that, knowing which, Mr. Arncliffe had waived when he had made her his wife.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. ARCHIBALD TO MRS. ARNCLIFFE.

THE RESIDENCY, November 3d.

"Your letter of October 28th found me upon a sick-bed, or otherwise I would have hastened to you to mingle my tears with yours in this sad hour. Forgive me, my dear child, if at times I have ridiculed what appeared to me to be the result of too much concentration of thought, on your part, upon the dark side of your life. If I have ever done so, it was because I sought, by investing with the garb of trivial troubles what you supposed to be great misfortunes, to teach you to look lightly upon sufferings which, I know, must have cost you many hours of bitter anguish, and to urge you to forget whatever, in other days, you were accustomed to look forward to as essentials to your future happiness. You were always, my dear Bertha, disposed to lay too much stress upon what your imagination would picture to you as the most probable destiny that the years that were to come would bring with them. You were always prone, in your days of girlhood, to connect the hope with the reality; and if you have had any sorrows in these later days, you must try to think of them not so much as sorrows that, of themselves, are worthy of tears, but as the non-realizations of what in your youth you fondly hoped would be.

"When I placed before you the advantages of a marriage

with Mr. Arncliffe, I did what I thought was my duty. I did not take into consideration (I will not say with what probable injustice to you) the fact that you had had the fancies to which I have referred. I did not think of them—if they ever crossed my mind—as other than mere imaginings which time and a better knowledge of what was expected of you would combine to remove. In the great step that a woman takes when she leaves the fireside of home to enter upon the duties of the married state, she does not (or should not) carry with her every little impulse that in the home-circle gave her reflection and caused hopes and expectations to arise which possibly the future would never find fulfilled. The strong, earnest resolve to do what is hers to do, and to forget whatever conflicts with that duty, is the only resolve a woman should have under those circumstances.

“When I urged you, if your conscience did not forbid it, to marry Mr. Arncliffe, I was looking forward to a day when, perhaps, I would not be here to protect you. I recognized in him a gentleman who, if he could never give you that love which, in your maidenhood, you anticipated would one day be yours, would at least give you the respect and protection that belongs, of right, to a wife. Therefore, when he proposed for your hand, I left it to your decision to accept him or to reject him. I thought a better acquaintance with him and his generous qualities would lead you to give him, if not love, at least that which is but a step from it, a quiet and contented heart. I trusted also that in entering upon your duties as mistress of Framleigh, you would carry the resolve into your new sphere to think only of, and to do only, what appertained to that position. If you have failed in this resolve, and if you find your nature still rebellious against what is your plain duty, you must struggle to conquer it; and if the struggle be a hard

one, your triumph will be so much the greater, when that conquest is effected.

“In regard to your expressed wish that you should be told of those things of which you are now ignorant, I shall proceed to tell you of them, and as briefly as I can. It is not a pleasant subject for me to linger upon; and but for this, that you have asked me to make you aware of that part of your history into which I have never given you an insight, I would never of my own accord break the seal that holds you from the truth.

“When you have read what I am about to write, Bertha, if you bear any regrets for what is past, let them go to the dead. Let them linger above the grave of that good mother of yours who was the only true parent whom God had blessed you with. I would not deprive a father of the affections of his child, but if that father has forgotten the duties he owed to God and man, and if he has neglected that child and brought sorrow to her mother, if I had any voice to advise, I would tell the child of such a man to guard in especial reverence and love the memory of the suffering angel who went to her grave blessing her offspring—blessing it and praying that God, in His mercy, would grant protection to the fatherless orphan.

“To suffer, and to suffer unrepiningly, and then to die with a prayer for the welfare of him who has brought grief to her who prays, is the act of a true Christian.

“It was so that your mother died, Bertha.

“Where, and how, shall I commence to tell you of it?

“Let me commence at the beginning.

“Your mother and I were early friends. We went to the same school, and when vacation would come around I would go to her house and spend a part of the holidays with her, and she would spend the remaining days, before the recommencement of studies, at mine. Your mother’s

father was the rector of our parish. Your grandmother had been dead for many years before your mother was married, and, with the exception of her father, your mother had no near relatives.

"The school we attended was situated in Cumberland. It was not far from one of the great iron-works of that district. The proprietor of these works was a gentleman named Tyrrel. The school-girls were accustomed frequently to go on holidays to the factory, accompanied by their preceptors, to see the machinery in motion.

"The gentleman who superintended the factory was a man of about thirty, of a dark, foreign look. I remember the girls used to call him the Black Count when speaking of him. He was very polite to us when we made inquiries as to the different portions of the building, and as to the purpose of certain intricate machinery which we could not comprehend. He was a handsome man and was very popular with the girls. His name was John Blacker, and he was your father.

"I do not hesitate to acknowledge to you, my dear Bertha, that I never liked your father. There was about him an irresolute manner, mingled with a certain passionate trait, which displeased me.

"If I were, at this distant day, to characterize him, I should say, from my recollection of what he was then, that he could never have resisted a firm, determined will; and that he would have exercised a tyrant's sway over what was weak and yielding.

"At any rate the future proved that my reading of his character was correct.

"As I did not, as I have before said, like your father, I saw, with much anxiety, that your mother was pleased with him.

"It was not alone on account of his nature that I felt

uneasy at what might spring from this growing intimacy. Your father's rank in life was many degrees lower than that of your mother, and I knew your grandfather too well to think that he would ever consent to a marriage between his daughter and John Blacker.

"What influence I possessed with your mother, I exerted in the attempt to dissuade her from any thought of opposing her father's will in this respect.

"But in vain. She loved as truly as woman ever loved man before, and all my advice and entreaties were useless. She *would* marry him, she said. What care had she for the opinion of the world? Was he not honest? Did he not love her?

"Poor Bertha! The tears are falling from my eyes as I think of her! Let me hurry over this portion of your mother's life. Let me come to the time that saw her flee from the protection of her father's roof to become the wife of John Blacker.

"She was married in a neighboring church; and when she went to the sacrifice—for it was a sacrifice—I went with her. I was very angry with her, but I pitied her and I could not desert her.

"When the news was brought to your grandfather that she had been clandestinely married to your father, he closed the doors of his house on her forever. Poor old man! He did not live long afterward to upbraid your mother for her conduct. The servants found him dead, one morning, in his bed; and he died without blessing her.

"For a year or more after her marriage, your mother's life was sufficiently happy. If your father neglected her, he did not ill-treat her. If he was wanting in the love that should have been hers, he was not wanting in a proper respect for her.

"It was about this time that you were born.

“What happened in your mother’s domestic relations after your birth I do not know. When we met, which was seldom, she never spoke concerning your father’s conduct; but I noticed that her cheek was paler than it had ever been before, and her manner was more dejected and indicated a secret sorrow.

“I never questioned her on the subject; but I had my suspicions of the truth. Your father had become dissipated, and I was positive that he had added harsh treatment to neglect.

“And now, my dear Bertha, I come to that which concerns you and me more closely.

“Captain Archibald had just retired from the army and had returned to ‘The Residency,’ as he called our little home in Westmoreland, to recruit his shattered health.

“We were sitting one evening in the parlor you know so well, and were speaking about the future. God had never given us children to love and care for, and we were repining, as we sometimes did, that this was so, and wishing for a little innocent to rear and foster as our own.

“As if in answer to our prayers—can I ever forget it?—a carriage drove up to the gate on the lawn and your poor mother descended, holding you in her arms. But what an answer to our prayers! The pallor of death sat upon her features, and in her wild eye I saw the traces of the conflict between duty and suffering—the long conflict that had resulted in her flight from her husband’s roof, as she had fled from her father’s, and bearing with her you, Bertha, the pledge that should have so united him to her that nothing could ever have parted them.

“As you read these words, do you know now, and can you understand, why I have kept the truth concealed from you?

“Oh, my daughter, in love if not in reality! your poor

mother was utterly broken-hearted, and your father's neglect had caused it.

"When she reached the porch—for I had gone out to meet her—she threw herself into my arms and said to me, 'Receive me, my dear friend, and protect me; if not for my sake at least for the sake of my innocent child. Be the sister to me you have always been, and let me lie beneath the shelter of your roof here and die.'

"And had it come to this? I thought.

"I did not question her upon the subject of her troubles. It was enough for me and my husband to know that she needed our protection. You were a little chubby thing at that time, just four years old; and as I took you from your exhausted mother's arms I told her that, if she should be called away before me, I would take you for my own and have a mother's care for you.

"Let me pass on to the end.

"Your father never came to our house to inquire for your mother. Whether he knew that she had come to us or not, he gave us no evidence, save in one instance, of this knowledge or this ignorance.

"From fragmentary words uttered by her, during her stay at our house, before she was called to rest, I learned that he had been a party to your mother's flight. He had told her that if she were unhappy with him she should go away and leave him and take her child with her; that he did not love her—

"Oh! what am I writing to you! What new sorrow am I adding to that surcharged heart of yours!

"You can scarcely remember, my poor child, the wasted figure at whose knees you nightly offered up your prayers. You cannot recall the prayers you then uttered under your mother's saintly guidance—the prayers that looked to God's blessing on the man who had blasted her life

and had forced her to lay her weary head under a stranger's roof.

"And the thousand little motherly acts of kindness—do you remember them, Bertha? No; you can scarcely recollect them. But they were there unceasingly, until that night when your mother resigned herself into God's keeping, and you were, indeed, an orphan.

"When your mother was laid to rest in the churchyard, you became my daughter. When my husband, your adopted father, died, shortly after your mother's death, I had no one left to comfort me in my desolation but you.

"Your childish prattle filled the void in my heart caused by the death of my husband, and my earliest friend, your mother. Had you been my own child, I could not have loved you more; and had I been your mother, you could not have returned that love more devotedly.

"The promise I had given to your mother, when she asked me to receive her, that I would care for you if she should die and leave you unprotected, I fulfilled joyfully. For I found in you a loving daughter and companion, to whose love and attention I have been indebted for whatever of happiness has been mine in my failing years.

"And now, dear Bertha, that you have the knowledge of that which has been kept concealed from you for so many years, let me write a few words in regard to your father.

"I do not know whether he be alive or dead. Your mother, during her life with me, received one letter from him. Strangely enough, it was directed to my care, as he supposed, doubtless, that I would know the refuge to which she had fled.

"She did not show me the letter; but she told me that *it contained expressions of remorse and penitence for what*

he had done, and she asked my advice as to what course she should pursue. I told her to write to him, without giving her address, but with instructions to direct his answer to my care, and to ask him if he would promise solemnly to be gentle with her if she should return to him. She did so. I caused the letter to be posted in a distant town. But no answer was ever received to this letter. We could not solve the mystery connected with his failure to reply.

"That was the last intimation that he was alive your mother ever received. Inquiries, instituted at the town in which he lived, resulted in our learning that, a few days before, he had gone away without leaving any trace as to his destination.

"From that time forth your mother looked upon him as dead, and she resigned herself to what was to be.

"After your mother's death your father was forgotten by me. He never came to claim you as his daughter, and I considered you as my own child.

"But once only have I since had reason to believe that he still lives. About the time we became acquainted with Mr. Arncliffe, I met a man in the streets of Brighton, during our residence there, whom I supposed to be your father. But, oh, so changed! I saw him for a moment only. The glance I had of him was too brief and unsatisfactory to lead me to believe positively that it was he. Although I looked anxiously for him, whenever I went in the street afterward, I never saw him more.

"If you think of him, my dear child, think of him forgivingly, and, to do this, think of him as dead. He *must* be dead. If he be not dead, what power stronger than death held him from your poor mother's side in her dying hour, as she died with blessings upon his guilty head?

"And now that I have answered you fully and com-

pletely, there is another subject upon which I must write you. Your letter breathes a deeper spirit of sorrow than I have ever perceived in what you have heretofore written. I will not seek to discover the mysteries of your heart, nor will I require that you should unbosom yourself to me. For I know that, after all, I am but your mother by adoption, and that there may be secret depths in your heart which only a mother's eye can search. But I would be false to myself and false to you, Bertha, if I were to shut my eyes to the fact that some great grief has overcome you. I will not name it—I cannot name it. It may be the grief that only a woman in your condition can feel. It may be that Mr. Arncliffe is wanting, in a measure, in kindness to you. It may be that you are causelessly unhappy, and that you confound, as of old, the dream with the reality.

“Oh, Bertha, if there be sorrow at your heart, and if it be death to let it remain there unrevealed, think of me, speaking to you now, as you would of the voice of your dead mother rising from the grave and saying to you: ‘If there be a secret in your heart that you should not dwell upon alone, reveal it.’”

“Think of this, Bertha; and if you would hesitate to reveal it to Mr. Arncliffe—if you dare not reveal it to him—remember that I am yet alive to guide you and to cherish you, if need be. Remember that whatever grief you have is my grief; and crush, I implore you, the false pride which seals your heart from

“Your mother,

“JANE ARCHIBALD.”

These were the words that, half-blinded with her tears, Mrs. Arncliffe read. She understood, now, that mystery of her mother's life, and of her own parentage, upon which

Mrs. Archibald had always refused to speak to her. She knew, also, what it was that Mr. Arncliffe had generously put aside when he married her—that even now the earth might be burdened with a living shame and disgrace who would, perhaps, some day, cross the threshold of her husband's house and say to her: Give me a share of your fortune, for I am your father.

Had it been given to her to comprehend the present and to read, with a prophet's understanding, the future, would any knowledge she might thus have possessed have made the mystery that lurked in the house in Balfour-street harmless for ill?

No.

For the Fates had decreed—and his whole life had sanctioned the decree—that Captain Horace Vernon should fulfil his destiny. And there was no power on the earth, or in the air, or in the waters that surround the earth, to change what was to be the ultimate end; to so cast his earthly actions as to ward off, and to leave unaccomplished, the consummation of that destiny.

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTAIN VERNON RECEIVES A LETTER FROM ABROAD.

THE love for Mrs. Arncliffe which had possessed Captain Vernon brought with it the misery incidental to such a love. It had not been the growth of years, but it was not the weaker for that. It had sprung to birth in an hour; but in that hour it had become the single powerful, absorbing passion of his life. It had so influenced him that whereas he had returned to Alderley with the resolve to secure Mrs. Arncliffe's co-operation in his purpose, now his pride revolted at the thought that he should appear before her a suppliant. Stronger in his case than it would have been in that of a man of a different nature—because his impulses, whether for good or for evil, were all of that intense kind—his hatred of the world which, before he had met Mrs. Arncliffe, had mastered him and had embittered his life, yielded to the softer feelings that controlled him when in her presence, or when thinking of her. But even in this submission there was a tinge of renewed bitterness; for in his strange persistency in holding society accountable for what he was, and what he had been, he believed that but for its persecution of him he would have been a better man, and that he might, perchance, in the dead years, have loved her and won her, and, in making her his wife, have continued those lessons that his mother had instilled into him—the lessons of patience and charity that only a loving woman can inculcate in a man's heart.

It was this feeling that had led him to act so strangely

in his second interview with Mrs. Arncliffe, when she spoke of the world in her gentle, kindly way. It was this feeling, aggravated by the thought that even to her, whom he loved, he dared not speak as his heart impelled him to speak, that led him to leave her presence with an abrupt speech upon his lips and with anger in his heart.

When he returned to the house in Balfour-street after his sudden departure from Framleigh-Place, Captain Vernon maintained for a long time a moody silence.

The attempts on Blacker's part to draw him into conversation having failed, the old man had left him to his own fancies. What these fancies were it would have been difficult to say. But from his frowning face and hard-set features, Blacker augured that something unusual had happened to him on his visit to Framleigh. What was it? thought the old man.

He had gone into his own room, and had left Captain Vernon sitting before the fire, and, as was his custom in his moments of displeasure, frowning at it.

The Captain's voice calling him to come to him, and saying that he wished to speak to him, brought him to the Captain's side.

When he entered the room, Captain Vernon was the first to speak. "Blacker," he said, "I did a thing for you to-day that I would not have done for any other: that I would not have done for myself. I invoked Mrs. Arncliffe's sympathy for you in what I called your sorrows."

The old man, standing by his chair, said that it was kind in him and generous in him to do so. But what did Bertha say to that?

"She said," the Captain answered, "that if you deserved her sympathy, she would give you that sympathy, and if you deserved her love, she would give you the love she would give to a father whom she has never known.

Blacker, look in your heart and tell me; do you deserve Bertha's love?"

The tears were standing in the old man's eyes, and his utterance was broken, as he answered, "As God is my judge, and for the misery I have brought upon myself, I believe that I do."

Captain Vernon said gently, "Yes, Blacker, I believe you do, or I would never have asked her for it in your name. That is all I desired to say. Leave me now, for I wish to be alone."

The old man, moving slowly toward the door, stopped to listen to Captain Vernon, who was speaking again.

"Do you remember," the Captain said, "how she looked when I last saw her, ten years ago? Do you remember how she blushed at that time when I looked at her as she entered the stage, going home for the holidays? Well, her face wore the same expression to-day, and the old blush was upon her cheek. The years have not changed her nature, Blacker."

Blacker came back as the Captain said this.

"Did she seem happy, Arthur?" he said.

"Happy? No!"

In the pause that ensued, the old man resumed his seat. "I somehow think, Arthur," he went on to say, with a look of pain, "that she is not happy. But why she should be unhappy I do not know."

"She is not happy. Whatever may be the cause, I *know* there is sorrow at her heart." The Captain, as he spoke, was dwelling upon the time when he had seen Mrs. Arncliffe weeping. Before the old man could reply, he said suddenly, "Do you know anything of Bertha's feelings for her husband?"

"No. She loves him, I hope."

With a quick, passionate gesture, as if he would spurn

the supposition away from him, Captain Vernon said, "Of course you hope so! But *does* she love him? See the difference in their ages. See the difference in their natures. See the shameful neglect with which he treats her!" The old man shook his head but gave no other answer.

"What a cursed torment is this thing men call 'love,'" pursued the Captain, falling into his old manner. "What a thing to laugh at when one does not feel it, and is, therefore, beyond its influence! What a very tyrant when it masters a man!"

"It is a feeling you have always despised, Arthur."

"I? Oh, yes! I have trampled it under foot! I have scorned it! It has been part of my life to avoid it. To love a woman I have considered synonymous with a surrender of a man's dignity. But what a tyrant it is!" He paused for an instant to look musingly into the fire.

"I wonder," he went on after awhile, "if men who commit crimes—say murder—for—for a woman's love are entirely in their senses? I wonder if the world, knowing the fire, the consuming passion, that burnt their lives away would adjudge them guilty of sin under those circumstances? It would seem to me that men should call it madness, *madness!*" His voice was husky and a dark flush overspread his face. His words were not addressed to his companion, but took the shape of a soliloquy as he continued speaking.

"I can imagine, without ever having undergone the martyrdom, what it is to be married and not to love. But worse than that, is to love hopelessly, to sigh for what can never be reached, to feel the sting and never to hope for the remedy. That, I think, is changing a man's life into an existence of the damned!

"It is a strange thing," he went on, still more in the way of a soliloquy than as addressing Blacker, "that this feeling

called 'love' should bring a man down to the level of a child or an old woman. It is strange that it should enter into a man's life and color its aspects to suit itself. When I reflect upon what I have known men to do all for the sake of this feeling, I begin to think there is a spell about it. Yes, it must be insanity!"

He roused himself as Blacker repeated after him, "Insanity?"

"Aye, insanity! What else is it but madness that puts such thoughts in a man's head as sober reason would laugh to scorn? What is it but madness that causes a man to dwell moodily upon death in fifty ways in contemplating a love that can never be his! Death to himself! Death to her whom he loves! Death, especially, to a rival who may be loved by his mistress! Blood, only, can quench such a fire, Blacker, and death knows no afterthought—no hopes unfulfilled—no sense of utter loneliness."

"With such feelings, Arthur, it is a blessing for you that you have never loved, or at least, that you have never loved without a return. But we were speaking of Bertha's love for Mr. Arncliffe."

He turned almost fiercely upon the old man. "Another time we will speak of that! Not now—not now!" Then he relapsed into his moody humor, and his companion left him.

The hours, coming and going, found Captain Vernon and Blacker holding communion, each to himself, apart. The hours, coming and going, brought with them the stroke of four, clanging out harshly from the town-clock, and they brought with them, too, a loud knock on the iron knocker of the front-door of the old house.

What strange visitor had announced himself in this knock? Nothing more mysterious than the Alderley postman whom Blacker, looking out of the window down on

him, saw standing on the pavement and staring at the grinning lion's head which had dropped its dust upon him as he knocked.

To Blacker's question, "What's wanted, my lad?" the postman answered, "Come down in a hurry, will you? Here's a dockyment from furrin parts for 40 Balfour-street."

Blacker, withdrawing his head from the window, made Captain Vernon aware of the reason of the knocking.

The Captain's face darkened with an angry frown as Blacker told him that the postman had brought a foreign letter with him.

Rising from his chair, he walked, as was his custom when anything had occurred to anger him, backward and forward with rapid strides. His right hand was clenched tightly. "The miserable fool!" he muttered; "if he should come here to threaten me, it would have been better for him that he had died at his mother's breast!" He turned to look for the old man to speak to him; but Blacker had gone down to receive the letter, and was now groping his way back through the darkened passage and up the mouldy stairway.

The Captain was still walking when Blacker returned, bearing in his hand a neat tidy letter which he gave to Captain Vernon. The latter glanced at it and read the direction upon it written in a delicate but cramped and foreign hand:

"The House, number 40, street of Balfour,

"At Alderley,

"Middlesex, England."

"That the letter be left at the House."

A mysterious direction, but Captain Vernon understood it, for he tore away the envelope angrily and sat down to

read what the letter contained. As he read his frown grew deeper and his eye glared with a fierce light.

He read it through to the end and then said to the old man, with a grim smile, "When I came to Alderley I left my friends behind me. Some of them have forgotten me, but others have not. Here is one who remembers me. Listen whilst I read to you what this friend of mine has written to me:

"PARIS, October 31st.

"*My dear Horace:*

"I was grieved to find, on my return to Paris this morning, that you had left so precipitately for England. Your note explaining the reasons for your departure reassured me, however. Nevertheless, what that I recognized the justice of your motives, I could not convince myself that you have well-done in acting without my assistance in the business. You have the strength, my dear Horace, it is true; but you have not the skill. You have the audacity, but you have not the *finesse*. Pardon me if I say that I have the skill and the cunning both. When we work together, it is the lion's strength allied to the fox's talent. Let us work together, therefore. You will conquer the man with the terror of your strength, and I—pardon me—I will do myself the honor of convincing the lady of the justice of our cause. I shall, therefore, do myself the pleasure of joining you soon in the beautiful little town of Alderley. Consequently, *au revoir* until we meet again.

"*Tout à vous,*

"SAINT-ELME."

These were the words that Captain Vernon read with a frown upon his brow and a sneer upon his lip, and to which the old man listened with a secret terror. For his heart told him that in those words lurked a new danger to Ber-

tha—the danger that a cunning, cruel mind, armed with a controlling knowledge, might bring against her. The old fear he had once felt that Captain Vernon would wield this knowledge to her detriment was excited anew as his companion read the letter that the postman had brought. But now he feared, not Captain Vernon, but the man who was his accomplice—the man who, even now, perhaps, was on his way to fulfil his purpose, bringing with him no tie of old acquaintance, and no fear of the law, to restrain his evil thoughts.

As Captain Vernon looked up after reading the letter Blacker said to him solemnly, “Arthur, if I understand you properly, you have thought better of your resolve to bring sorrow, and it may be shame, to Bertha. If in an unguarded moment you have made this man who has written to you a sharer in the knowledge you possess, I charge you, as you revere the memory of your mother and as you respect your good resolutions and my sorrows, to hold his malice from Bertha. For, if you fail in this, if there be strength enough in this arm, weak as it is, that man shall never cross the threshold of Framleigh—shall never bring renewed grief to that heart which has known neither a mother’s nor a father’s love.”

In these words, wrung from him by the insolent threat contained in the letter which had just been read, the old man rose to a dignity the Captain had never seen appear in him before.

Folding the letter slowly Captain Vernon placed it in his pocket. When this was done he rose and walked to where Blacker was standing. With his hand upon the old man’s shoulder he answered him.

“My destiny has made this man a part of my future. Whilst I despise him I must treat him with friendliness. But if he should attempt to carry out his threat—if he

should attempt to slime, with his presence, the paths in which Bertha walks, let him look to it, for I will crush him as I would crush a serpent that had attempted to bite me. If it should cost me a life for a life, let him but breathe to her the knowledge he has wrung from me and he shall die!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT FRAMLEIGH-PLACE.

WHILST mysterious fate, whereof no breathing thing can foretell the course or guard against the decrees, was thus evolving itself in the house in Balfour-street and hurrying Captain Vernon with it to the end, how fared it with Mrs. Arncliffe in the dreary splendors of Framleigh?

Not well, apparently; for her face was rarely seen beyond the door of her chamber and her footfall was seldom heard on the broad stairway leading to the darkened drawing-room.

Society, as inexorable as destiny, coming periodically, as was its wont, to flutter in and out of the hall-door of Framleigh, to descend from shining carriages and to sniff with well-bred ease the stomach-comforts it was its duty to discuss in common with one another's merits, would be occasionally put off in a stately way by the Martyr with an intimation that Mrs. Arncliffe was not visible, or would be received with the hopeful answer that the Gorgeous Victim, lolling upon the cushioned chairs in the hall, would make it his business to seek his mistress and learn whether she were at home or not. On these latter occasions Society, lounging in the parlors, sitting before the fire and gossiping pleasantly, would indulge, with the usual delicate fingering that deprived the performance of any practical importance, in the cakes and the golden sherry which gleamed in the flimsy glasses, wondering in the pauses whether its dear friend would be at home to receive it.

Sometimes a rustle would be heard on the stairway, and it would be gratified in its wish in beholding the pale face lighted with the stereotyped smile that the occasion enforced—the face that grew more weary and more weary as the hours passed on. Sometimes the Victim, standing like a splendid but impracticable painting in the doorway and surveying his persecutors with a rebuking eye, would express Mrs. Arncliffe's regrets that her health would not permit her to receive her dear friends this morning, coupled with a hope that she entertained that they would not consider themselves under any restraint, but that they would remain and rest themselves and make themselves at home. Whereupon, not slow to avail itself of this gracious invitation, Society, when this message would come to it, would proceed to please Mrs. Arncliffe in the matter by resting itself and making itself entirely at home.

There was, however, this remarkable trait in the resting, and making itself at home, of Society. That it would rest itself sometimes standing up, and sometimes sitting down, and always solaced by what the lace curtains revealed. This method of complying with Mrs. Arncliffe's wishes carried with it, however, gall and wormwood to the hearts of the Stately Martyr and the Gorgeous Victim; for then might these be seen, after the manner of a weak skirmishing force, dashing wildly at the field of strife, typified by the space beyond the curtains, and then falling back to rally on the main body, bearing with them such trifling trophies as a plate of cakes, a chicken pie, preserved fruits and decanters of that rare old wine wherein Society so much rejoiced. To do this, and to retire for awhile, in ambush, and to stare, the one at the other, with suppressed breathings and a scornful eye.

When Society had looked upon itself as sufficiently rested, and when, by dint of sudden sallies from their ambush,

the Martyr and the Victim had divested the field of action of all objects of interest, it would suddenly become aware that it had calls upon its time and attention elsewhere and would go forth to roll away in luxurious carriages; and to flutter, in the later hours, in other drawing-rooms, and to go through the same evolutions on a more extended scale.

Leaving behind it the Stately Martyr and the Gorgeous Victim, bitterly lamenting their fate and lying in an exhausted condition on the chairs in the hall.

Leaving behind it my dear friend, little thought of and rarely mentioned, holding her face in her hands and weeping in the loneliness of her bridal-chamber.

The tears that were in Mrs. Arncliffe's eyes were no strangers there now. Whereas they had come at long intervals before, they rarely left her now. To the grief of loving madly and rashly that which she should not have loved was added the other grief, that Mrs. Archibald's letter had disclosed, that possibly her father still lived.

How and where, she could not bear to dwell upon.

If ever she thought of it, she thought of that long neglect that had left her, his daughter, under a stranger's care, and the recipient of a stranger's bounty. She thought of him as living, outcast and neglected—outlawed, perhaps, by the commission of crimes, and neglected by the good for what he had done. She thought of him—not as she had thought of him in her early years, as dead, somewhere, but with no crime attached to his name, dead to this life but living in the next—but as one who lurked in byways avoiding his fellow-man and shunned by all who met him. A terrible picture for a daughter's mind to dwell upon! And that other picture which her imagination brought constantly before her eyes!—that some day would appear before the household—aye, even before Mr. Arncliffe himself—a

wretched, forlorn, and broken outcast who would claim her before God and man as his child—who would hold up his tatters before her eyes and say, “Are you so unnatural, Bertha, that you will not speak to your father? Are you so dead to filial feeling that you, too, will turn away from me as the world does?”

But this thought, terrible as it was, was not the only doubt that fastened itself upon her mind.


Mrs. Archibald had appealed to her to reveal the secret that made her unhappiness more eloquent than before—the secret that had betrayed itself in her letter to her adopted mother.

Should she make known to Mrs. Archibald the secret of her love for Captain Vernon? Should she write to her and tell her the whole truth, and implore her to remember that she had never loved Mr. Arncliffe: implore her to remember this and that he had married her with this knowledge, and urge this to Mrs. Archibald as extenuation for the wrong she had allowed herself to commit in loving Captain Vernon?

As she thus questioned herself she buried her face more deeply in her hands. Up to the roots of the fair hair burned the crimson-hued shame with which she asked herself this question; even to the tips of her fingers did the quick blood fly at this thought of betraying the secret of her heart to another.

Mrs. Archibald had said that it was death to leave that secret unrevealed. If it were death to leave it unrevealed—to let it lie buried in her own heart the spring of morbid meditations—did she add to her sin in withholding it from one who had always been her guide and teacher? If ever the day should come that would see Captain Vernon a suppliant at her feet, could she implicitly rely on her own strength to continue in the performance of her duty?

With these self-questionings came a resolve to confide to Mrs. Archibald the secret of her life; and in doing this she trusted that the sacrifice she would make would weigh in the scales against the wrong she had done Mr. Arncliffe. And so, once again the memories of the past flocked around her as she sat and wrote to Mrs. Archibald.



CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. ARNCLIFFE TO MRS. ARCHIBALD.

"FRAMLEIGH-PLACE, November 12th.

PITY me, and forgive me for what I have to write to you to-day. Think of your Bertha as you would think of her in those old days when she had no thought hidden from you: when, in the innocence of her heart, you were a sharer in whatever brought trouble to her. Think of those days as if they had never departed from us and guide me now as you were accustomed to guide me then.

"I need not tell you what tears were mine as I read your letter. Tears for what that good mother, whom I can scarcely remember, suffered. Tears for what that father who has avoided me has done. I think I could be happy if I could go to some grave, however humble, and weep above it and say, here lies my father in quiet, with no sin attached to him. For oh, mother, I do not believe that he is dead! I cannot believe it!

"But I have a horrible dread that he may come before me some day, not with the love that a father should bear a child—not with remorse in his look and penitence in his words; but with curses upon his lip and passion in his eye—come to me and urge his relationship, and, in the face of all about me, parade his wretchedness and say to that proud husband of mine: 'If this woman be your wife, she is my daughter. Now, let her judge between us!'

"But if some day he should come and claim my love with the grief that remorse has brought with it; if he should come and tell me that he is not now what he has

been; if he should come like the veriest beggar to this proud house and should implore me to forgive *his* sins and *his* sorrows, could I hesitate to be a daughter to him then?

“Do not think that, in what I am about to say now, I would reproach you for having concealed this knowledge of my father and his conduct so long from me. I know that you have hitherto refrained from telling me of it because you judged it best that I should be ignorant of it; but I cannot conceal from myself that, had I known this before, I would have been happier in what would have sprung from that knowledge than I am now; for then I should never have married Mr. Arncliffe. Never have linked him to *my* shame and *my* disgrace—never have known the grief that has come to me since that marriage!

“What to me are the pomp and pride in which I live! What care I for the vanities of life when they are allied to the greatest sorrow that can fill a woman’s heart!

“Better the humblest home with one whom I love—with *him* whom I love—than all the worldly dignity that my position as Mr. Arncliffe’s wife gives me!

“Oh, mother, do you understand now why your Bertha is unhappy?

“I have written it, and I must not recall it.

“Him whom I love!

“Not Mr. Arncliffe, mother—and what do you, what *can* you think of me, when I acknowledge it?—not Mr. Arncliffe, my husband!

“How did that love come to me? you will ask. Oh, mother, I do not know! How does life come to us and how does death follow it—how does the world go on, from year to year and from century to century, bringing with it in its course new beings to live, and to suffer and to die?

“Is it chance? Is it destiny?

“This great love that controls me as if I drew my life from it; this mad love that makes me as helpless as a child before it; this passionate realization of all that I have ever dreamed of in the man of my love, came to me as life comes to us all, with no will of my own and with no thought of wrong to Mr. Arncliffe.

“I did not consider that, I did not consider what was to be the end—and, oh, what *will* be the end—I only felt that the moment had come, which must come to every woman’s heart, when I was to love, and, in that love, be wretched forever!

“I will not tell you who he is. It is not necessary that I should do so. If I have been weak enough and rash enough to permit any feeling to control me, beyond the measure of duty I owe to my husband, I can at least hold the object of it in my inmost heart. You know me well enough to know that no word or action of mine, within my control, shall ever testify that love to him.

“Whilst I am Mr. Arncliffe’s wife I will not forget what is due to the proud nature that allied me to itself, believing that I would value his name and the honor of his race as he had valued them before.

“I can at least do this, mother. I *will* at least do this. But, whilst I do not tell you his name, I can tell you of his nature. If I have read him aright—and I know that I have—his nature is very, very cruel. Not only to those who oppose him, but to those who love him, as well.

“Oh, am I not to be pitied, that I love so sinfully, and that he whom I love should be what he is!

“If I were other than I am, and if my affection and companionship could save him from himself—for he is his worst enemy—I would give him that affection and companionship, even if it led me to gaze at him through a prison’s bars.

"Oh, mother, what am I in your eyes! Are you not asking yourself: Is this the woman whom I taught to follow the good? Is this wretched woman, who thus writes her own shame, the innocent girl who left my home to fill a wife's part in life?

"The same, mother! The same, in her love for you and in her gratitude for what you have done for her, but oh, how fallen in her own esteem!

"If you could look into my heart and see what resolve rests there you would not upbraid me. You would understand the bitter struggle that has made me strong to resist this great temptation. You would read there the triumph of what you have taught me, and you would be happy in the thought that the child of your love and confidence will remain true to your teachings—even if her heart should break in the endeavor.

"Ah, if I were only with you now, in this my greatest hour of agony! But I cannot go to you. Mr. Arncliffe wishes me to remain here at Framleigh. If you were nearer to Framleigh, he would, perhaps, permit me to go to you. But he expects to return shortly, for a while, and I must be near him when he shall come.

"And what a meeting will that be! Can I go to him and welcome him when he crosses the threshold of his home—the same threshold that *he* has crossed—can I go to him as before and try to induce him to lay aside that cold bearing of his which has chilled me when with him?

"And if he should look into my eyes and say, in his proud, quiet way: Bertha, you have been the guardian of my honor during my absence from home. Is it a worthy guardian of that honor whom I have made my wife?

"Oh, what answer could I make to such a question!

"What more can I say to you, now, to make you aware of the great sorrow I could not conceal from you? I have

but one thing to tell you, and I shall have told you all. This man of whom I have written is known to me only through a casual introduction. I am ignorant of his family, his history and his parentage. I have met him but twice; and before meeting him I had neither seen, nor heard of, him before.

“And so ends my confession, mother, to you.

“Deal gently with me and guide, with your motherly advice,

“Your unhappy

“BERTHA.”

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTAIN VERNON RECEIVES A VISITOR.

THERE is no power, whereof mortal can understand the origin, to hold back time in its onward course. It may lag heavily to those, weary of waiting, who look forward to a future bright with hopes fulfilled and desires accomplished. It may fly with the tempest's swiftness to the doomed wretch staring from the condemned cell upon the rising and the setting sun. But, as surely as man liveth, time walks with him and brings with it his allotted portion. To some, all that is good and beautiful. To others, all that is dark and terrible.

What did time, in its revolving course, bring to Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, moody and restless in the house in Balfour-street?

It brought many things with it. It brought to him his usual bitterness of spirit and hatred of the world, intensified by the thought of the despairing love that grew stronger as the days went on. It brought with it the vision of what, under other and happier circumstances, he might have been, and with it, too, the reality of what he was. It brought with it repinings and self-reproaches, and all manner of maledictions for what, in the course of his lost life, had come to him.

There is something strangely depressing in the feeling with which one treads the deserted rooms of a house which stands a patriarch among its fellows and about which the evidences of decay are gathered. In the contemplation of

its mouldy walls; of the dust that settles silently everywhere; in listening to the murmurs that come from straining rafters, too long taxed and rebelling against the uses to which man has so long put them; in speculating upon the mysterious noises that abound from attic to cellar—mysterious noises that take the shape of woful voices pleading for liberation from captivity; we go back and dwell upon those who in the past years may have inhabited it and who, dying therein, have left the dust and decay and the complaining voices as legacies to their successors. But oh, the unutterable loneliness of such a house wanting the happy laughter and the quick footfalls of little children! Within the walls so bereft is solitude indeed. And if there be any companionship for the living there, it is only that which springs from the memory of the dead.

Did time, inexorable and un pitying, bring to Captain Horace Vernon sitting in the uncertain light in the house in Balfour-street and thinking of these things, nothing save regrets for the past and doubts of what was to come?

Knock, knock, knock.

It sounded with a strange, ominous sound through the gloomy passages and in the silent chambers of the old house.

There was no light in the room in which sat Captain Vernon when this hollow challenge came to his ear, rung out from the iron knocker beneath the lion's head. But on his face the red moon, rising slowly above the tops of the chimneys opposite, glared with a foreboding hue as it stared at him through the windows of the room in which he was born.

Who was it? What had brought him or her, man, woman or child, to the house in Balfour-street to disturb its inmates at that hour and to let out into the moonlit street a measure of the gloom and mystery that hung about them?

Knock, knock, knock.

Captain Vernon struck his hand angrily upon the table by his side and shouted, "Blacker!"

He turned to listen to a response from the old man, and, in that moment, the door leading into the street clanged to with a vigor that shook the house to its foundation.

In that moment, too, another foot had crossed the threshold of the house, which alone, of all his father's fortune, remained to Captain Vernon.

They were coming up the stairs. Captain Vernon stared frowningly at the door that led into the dark passage. He could hear the old man's voice speaking to some one. Blacker was answering a question.

"It was his father's house and he lived here before he went abroad."

Then came the answer to that. "*Peste!* But I would pull it down, if it were mine!"

As these words came to his ear Captain Vernon rose from his chair, and, folding his arms, stood silently, looking darkly at the door.

They were in the passage upon which the door opened. Captain Vernon heard Blacker speaking again.

"What shall I tell him? What name shall I give?" and the other voice answered, "What name? True—I had forgot! For want of a better one, say that Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, wishes to see him."

The door of Captain Vernon's room opened and the old man appeared dimly upon the threshold.

The light of the moon, falling upon Captain Vernon, revealed the Captain's tall figure to Blacker as he stood in the doorway; but it did not require this light to indicate that Captain Vernon was alert and waiting, for a loud voice rang through the house as the door opened. The voice was Captain Vernon's.

"There is no need of ceremony! Let Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme from Paris enter!" he said. And then by Blacker's side stood another figure. The figure of a slight, fragile man, smoking a cigarette.

There was a hard, cruel look upon this man's face. There was a fixed smile of a sneering character upon his lips. There was a cold, metallic glitter in his black eyes, which were round and small and which might have been farther away from each other without injury to their expression. His face was very pale, and in this respect of paleness it was not marred by the growth of whiskers or moustache.

His dress was rigidly simple and of a black color. His coat was buttoned up to his chin and upon his arm hung suspended a heavy cloak. Altogether, with his black eyes and close cropped hair, with his sneering smile and his sombre garb and secretive aspect, this new visitor from Paris, as he had announced himself, was not apparently a visitor of the most desirable kind.

Blowing the smoke from him, and emitting it from his nostrils, the stranger peered into the room until his look fell upon Captain Vernon, standing, a dark shadow shutting out the light of the moon.

"*Diable!*" ejaculated the foreigner, turning to look about him uneasily; "have I got into a den of thieves here!"

Captain Vernon, still standing with folded arms, answered him slowly.

"Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme had better remember that he is in my house."

Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, smoking his cigarette and swallowing the smoke, and blowing it from his nostrils, answered in an equally leisurely tone, "Ah! have I then the pleasure of listening to my friend—" He hesitated for a moment, glancing at Blacker meaningly.

"Captain Horace Vernon," the Captain, filling up the sentence, said.

"Still the same Horace, eh! Very good, and very well."

Captain Vernon had not asked him to walk in and take a seat, but Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, did not deem any invitation necessary, for he picked his way carefully to the fireplace, and placing his hands behind him stood with his back to the fire, gently balancing himself upon his toes.

The light from the moon fell upon the two men as they silently surveyed each other. Blacker, when Monsieur Raphael had entered the room, had left them, closing the door after him.

There was no one there to listen to what Captain Vernon had to say to Monsieur Raphael, or to what Monsieur Raphael had to say to Captain Vernon.

The foreigner, smoking leisurely and warming himself before the fire, preserved a placid silence. In the intervals when his cigarette was withdrawn from his lips his face wore the smile which might have appeared, to a man looking at him in the gloom, to be a habitual one. Not a pleasant smile though. Rather a smile of that cruel, sneering nature. His figure, by contrast with Captain Vernon's, seemed almost child-like—so slenderly was he fashioned and so lithe were his limbs.

Monsieur Raphael was the first to break the silence.

"*Bah!* I perceive that I am not welcome!" he said. "Why do you not ask me to take a chair? Why do you not cause a light to be brought? Is it that you are afraid of me, perhaps?"

His sneering voice aroused Captain Vernon. It was strange that he did not throw Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme out of the window; but he merely placed his hand

on his shoulder and forced him into the chair in which he himself had been sitting a few moments before. When he had done that, he took a match from the box on the mantelpiece, lit it, and held it to the candle on the table. The sudden light breaking upon the gloomy room revealed the two men to each other.

What it revealed was Captain Vernon looking down frowningly on the foreigner's face, and the foreigner looking up into that of his companion with his habitual smile.

"Always the strong, foolish Horace, eh! Always considering me the child, and you the strong man! Very good, and very well."

The look that was in his eyes, and which lurked in his smile, was one of the most un-childlike possible. It was a look which might, possibly, have come from a child whom a she-wolf had suckled; for it was wolfish in a painful degree.

The cold, glittering eye, too, partook more of a snaky, than of a human, character; and the most ordinary observer might have been pardoned for supposing that, at that moment, with his wolfish look and his snaky eyes, Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, did himself injustice in comparing himself to one of the most innocent of God's creatures.

He had taken a small pocket-book from his pocket and had torn a leaf from it. Thrusting the thumb and forefinger of his right hand into his vest pocket he brought up a pinch of tobacco and proceeded to roll it up in the leaf he had torn from the book. When he had done this he offered the cigarette politely to Captain Vernon.

Captain Vernon took no notice of this, save to frown more angrily at him.

Monsieur Raphael, observing this, remarked simply,

"No? Very well!" and, holding it to the candle-flame, lit it and smoked it himself.

He had smoked for a few moments in silence, when Captain Vernon drew a chair up to the table and sat down opposite him.

Folding his arms, he leaned back in his chair, and, with the table between them, the two men looked at each other.

Whatever might have been the meaning that Captain Vernon had intended to convey when he told Blacker that Monsieur Raphael was a part of his destiny, and whatever may have been the sense of subjection, on the Captain's part, expressed in that remark, it is not to be denied that Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme was a bold man to look with unruffled ease into the dark eyes that were lowering upon him. A bold man to do this at any time, and especially if his death could free the man, at whom he gazed so smilingly, from any hidden ill.

The two men, looking at each other across the table, observed each other narrowly. The smile upon the foreigner's face became more sneering when Captain Vernon, breaking the silence between them, said to him, "Raphael, you are a bolder man than I gave you credit for being. If you were twice as bold a man as you are you would still be a bolder man than I thought."

Monsieur Raphael, looking dimly at Captain Vernon through the smoke from the cigarette, answered, "I *am* a bold man, Horace. I was called 'Raphael the Courageous' when I was young. There is no man alive who can say how bold I am."

The tone in which he spoke implied that, possibly, some man who was not alive, had it been given to the dead to speak, might have spoken more knowingly upon the subject of that special attribute of his.

Captain Vernon went on speaking.

"Are you aware, my dear Raphael," he said, "that you have done the boldest act of your life?"

"Ah? And how, my good Horace?"

"By pursuing me to this place."

The foreigner's eye glittered as he looked, first at Captain Vernon, and then around the room. But upon his face rested, without a shade, his old smile. He made no reply to Captain Vernon's last remark, but said coolly, "It is not my fault if the mails miscarry. I wrote to you last month that I would be here. Or I might have been mistaken in the direction. This is the house, number 40, Balfour-street, is it not?"

"The mails did not miscarry, Raphael; I received your letter, and this is the house, number 40, Balfour-street. But it was not in warning me that you would be here that you have shown the boldness of which I speak."

"*Peste!* Explain yourself. I am a frank man and cannot read riddles!"

"I *will* explain myself. You know me, and you will understand me when I tell you that, of all the bold acts you have ever committed, the boldest was in following your letter to Alderley."

Had Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme been a discreet man, as well as a bold, he would, possibly, have returned to Paris at his earliest convenience. But as he was simply a bold man and not overcharged with discretion—if the crafty cunning that looked out of his snaky eyes be excepted—he answered, "It is because I know you, Captain Vernon, that I am here. It is because you know me that I shall remain."

Whatever threat may have been embodied in this speech of the foreigner's, it was not without its influence on Captain Vernon; for he said in reply, "Since you are here,

Raphael, beware how you conduct yourself! Affairs are changed since we last met."

The smile upon the foreigner's face changed to a look of incredulity as the Captain spoke and his harsh voice wore a mocking tone as he made answer, "*Diab!e!* You become virtuous, my Horace!"

Captain Vernon answered fiercely. "See here, Raphael!" he said. "When I left that note for you in Paris, telling you that I was about to return to England for a certain purpose, and that you would be a sharer in the result of my efforts, in case I succeeded, I told you what was true. But now I tell you, once for all, that affairs have changed and that the thing is impossible!"

Upon the foreigner's face rested a blank look. He passed his hand over his close-cropped hair in an uncertain way and stared at his companion.

"Once for all, I tell you the thing is impossible!" repeated Captain Vernon, striking the table with his open hand.

"Impossible, my Horace? Nothing is impossible! Leave the affair to me. *Bah!* this is a bad jest of yours!"

"A jest or not, it is so! I have relinquished it and you must do the same."

"And my five thousand francs?"

"What five thousand francs?"

"The five thousand francs I borrowed on the strength of what you promised! *Diab!e!* Am I to be hunted down for those five thousand francs?"

"Did I tell you to borrow money in consideration of what might result from any promise of mine? No! Repay your borrowed francs!"

"Repay them? Yes, if the *Lapin Blanc* would give them back to me."

"You have gambled them away already?"

"*Peste!* And what else?"

The foreigner looked nervously at Captain Vernon and Captain Vernon looked angrily at him.

The Captain could not help thinking that in the loss Monsieur Raphael deplored might arise complications which he had not foreseen. Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, possessor of five thousand francs, and Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme in debt for five thousand francs, and out of pocket to that amount, were two distinct individuals.

"As you have gambled that money away," said Captain Vernon, "you must gamble it back again. If you have had any hope of regaining it through my instrumentality you must surrender that hope; for you can profit nothing by the possession of the secret."

While Captain Vernon was speaking the foreigner appeared to regain his usual self-possession. He had rolled up a cigarette and was holding it to the candle. Upon his face the sneer was triumphant, and his snaky eyes glittered with a self-satisfied expression.

"Ah, my Horace," he said, with the smoke curling above his head, "always the same irresolute, passionate nature! When will you learn from me to control yourself? See how cool I am. I lose five thousand francs and I smile!"

The sneer deepened about his lips, and his teeth, sharp as those of a shark, glistened for a moment in the candle-light as his lips parted in the smile of which he had made mention.

Captain Vernon observed this sudden change in him, and, well as he knew him, he could not account for it. What had caused Monsieur Raphael to smile at his loss? What ultimate purpose lurked under his affected indifference? Would he return to Paris and forget what had brought him to Alderley?

In pursuance of this train of thought he addressed him.

"You accept circumstances as you find them, Raphael?" he said. "You will cease to think of what cannot be?"

"I accept circumstances as I find them at present. I recognize the justice of your action, for I know you are too soft-hearted to cause a delicate woman to weep, my Horace!" This in his mocking way, and with his eye fixed on the receding smoke.

Captain Vernon made no answer to this, but merely looked at his companion thoughtfully. He understood Monsieur Raphael's sneer when he spoke of his soft-heartedness, but he could see no clue, in the foreigner's words, as to what course the latter would pursue.

Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, looking, through the smoke, like an indistinct painting of the spirit of Scorn, spoke again.

"And now that this is settled," he said, "when do you return to Paris?"

Captain Vernon hesitated. Should he tell him that he had no thought of returning to that city?

The foreigner, observing the look of hesitation, repeated his question, but in another way.

"Of course, my good Horace, you will not linger upon this inhospitable soil? Of course you will return to Paris now?"

The answer came from Captain Vernon's lips as though he begrudged the words.

"No. I do not expect to return to Paris for—a long time."

The foreigner turned slightly in his chair, the better to observe Captain Vernon. With his hand he cleared the air around his head.

"Observe me now, my brave!" he said. "When it was agreed on between us that you were to use the knowledge, that you and I have, to our mutual advantage, it was not

stipulated that you should be weak or soft-hearted. *Peste!* It is criminal, in affairs of this high importance, to be weak or soft-hearted! When I borrowed those five thousand francs, in believing that you would make the expense good to me, I did that which would have done honor to Damon in trusting his Pythias; I—pardon me—gave evidence of a childlike confidence which you do not appreciate, my Horace. When I sacrificed those five thousand francs—again like Damon—on the altars of friendship, I smiled away my loss, as I smile now, to do you pleasure. But when you propose to remain here, and expect me to go back to my creditors in Paris, *diable!* my good Horace, you expect too much from your Damon!”

“I have not asked you to go back to Paris,” rejoined Captain Vernon. “What I expect, though, is that you forget what brought you and me here.”

“Very good, and very well!”

“In forgetting that you will do wisely.”

“Ah, *Bah!* You do not threaten me?”

“I threaten no one. If I have reason to punish I do so without menaces. I do not resort to words, but I act.”

“Yes, but you act rashly, sometimes, my old one!”

What power did those few words possess that they should cause Captain Vernon to rise impetuously from his chair and to make a step toward the foreigner and then halt suddenly? What menace was contained in those few words that they should cause Captain Vernon to clench his fist and to tower, with an angry threat, above the form of Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris? What sense of provocation, suddenly springing to birth in the foreigner’s mind, caused Monsieur Raphael to rise at the same moment and to stand on his guard, with his right hand thrust into the bosom of his vest, and to follow, with his glittering eye, Captain Vernon’s movements? There was a mystery

hidden in his language, for he had scarcely uttered it before the two men were watching each other like beasts of the forest—the one ready to defend himself, the other ready to assault.

The moon, no longer red-hued, looked through the window at them and mingled its pale light with the yellow glimmer of the candle. It fell full upon the foreigner's face and left a ghastly pallor there and found the sneering smile wanting there; for Monsieur Raphael's thin lips were compressed, and the look upon his face was the look of a man who might have aroused a lion and who was guarding against his attack.

The silence between the two men was broken by Captain Vernon. He said, still glaring down upon the foreigner, "Do you wish me to kill you, Raphael?"

With his hand fumbling in his vest, and his active limbs firm-set to meet any attack from the Captain, the foreigner made answer.

"He must be a quick man, Captain Vernon, who takes Raphael Saint Elme unaware. *Peste!* Pardon me—you are strong, but you are not quick!"

Captain Vernon drew himself away from the neighborhood of his companion and sat down again.

"Sit down, Raphael, and let us talk," he said, abruptly.

But Monsieur Raphael did not sit down. He stood with his back to the fire, looking with a studious eye at Captain Vernon. He had quite regained his composure and his face was now as unruffled, save by the smile, as though in all his life he had had no cause to disturb him.

From the top of his close-cut black hair, down to the tips of his varnished boots, Monsieur Raphael's whole appearance indicated, in a language as strong as words, "I do not deny that I have passion; but—*diable!*—I also have composure!"

Standing with his back to the fire, with the smile upon his lip and the snaky look in his eye, and observing Captain Vernon, Monsieur Raphael rolled up another cigarette and was soon busily engaged in blowing the smoke from him or in swallowing it and emitting it from his nose.

"My Horace," he said, "when will you learn to control yourself? You do not do justice to my friendship. I repeat, my comrade, that you are rash. If you were not rash, my old one, you would not quarrel with me."

"Let that pass. Put a guard upon your speech and beware how you provoke me, for I may forget my good resolutions, and then"—

"And then, my Horace?"

"If I were to die for it fifty times I would have your life!"

The foreigner's manner lost a little of its bravado when Captain Vernon said this. Bold as he was and cunning as he was, he knew that he was not a bolder man than Captain Vernon and that what the latter said he would do would be done if ever the necessity, in his judgment, should arise.


Monsieur Raphael, smoking and warming himself, was thinking busily. He had not come all the way from Paris to quarrel with Captain Vernon. But he had come to Alderley in order to be of assistance in that little matter of which he and the Captain had spoken.

In relinquishing the pursuit of that little matter what had Captain Vernon abandoned? In a pecuniary point of view what had my good Horace rashly given up? According to his own testimony, as set forth in the note that he had written before his departure from Paris, he had given up the fair opportunity of making a thousand pounds. *Diable!* But that was wrong, that was foolish on the part of my Horace! And for what consideration? For the

-consideration of sitting alone, in a dark room, in a tumble-down old house, and quarrelling with his best friend? No; it could not be that. There must have been some greater power than that brought to bear upon my Horace's mind to cause him to forget what had been a determination with him for so many years. Was it fear of the consequences? *Bah!* My Horace had no fears! Was it a weak resolution? *Bah!* again. My Horace had no weak resolutions! If it were not fear of the consequences, nor the result of weakness, what was it? Had my Horace seen the lady, had he pitied her, had he loved the lady, and, in loving her, had he come to the resolve to be virtuous and to forego the possibility of causing her sorrow?

When Monsieur Raphael had reached this point in his train of thought he paused and looked with peculiar interest at his companion. He thought of the great change that had come over the Captain since their last parting. He thought of the cold reception that had been accorded him, and of Captain Vernon's earnestness in impressing upon him the necessity of forgetting what had brought him to Alderley, and of his angry look when he had said that he—Monsieur Raphael—was a bolder man than he had esteemed him to be in following his letter to Alderley.

Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, had not been exposed to the ups and downs of life without gaining a certain crafty insight into its mysteries. He knew that there was but one power in the heart of man before which all avarice, and passion, and fear yielded. He knew that this power was called love; and in his cunning reading of Captain Vernon's nature he recognized, in this power, the motive of his actions. The cold moon looking upon him through the window; the dim candle-light falling upon him from the table; the reflection of the bright fire flaring upon him from the opposite wall, centred in his face to light



up his countenance and to reveal his lip curling with a more cruel sneer and his eye glittering with a more snaky look than they had expressed before. In his scorn of sentiment—a scorn that Captain Vernon had often re-echoed with him—and in his disregard of the gentler attributes of human nature, he looked at Captain Vernon, leaning upon the table in sombre reflection, as a weak-minded man who had fallen from his dignity in allowing so poor a passion to master him. To yield, to a woman's love, that which might have made them rich! *Bah!* it was pitiful!

With an angry gesture he threw into the fire the half-burnt cigarette he had been smoking and walked to the table. Leaning with both hands upon it before Captain Vernon he said to him scornfully, "*Peste!* Are you a woman that you act like one? Has your visit to Alderley made a woman of you?"

Captain Vernon lifted his head and looked at him for a moment without replying. Then he rose from his chair and walked to the window. He threw up the sash to let in the air and to cool his fevered brow. Standing there motionless, he gazed out into the quiet street, and in that position he answered the foreigner.

"Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme cannot understand me," he said. "Therefore let him refrain from questioning me. Let him be satisfied with the knowledge he already possesses, and let him question me no further."

The tone in which Captain Vernon spoke forebade any answer. It was the tone of a man who felt some deep resolve; and Monsieur Raphael did not care to provoke him at that moment by referring again to that subject.

Standing by the table, the foreigner spoke again.

"I came from London," he said, "by the six o'clock train, and I shall go back by the early morning train. I am welcome to a bed in your house to-night, I hope?"

"Since you are here, I will not drive you forth, Raphael. You shall sleep here to-night," Captain Vernon answered, without turning to look at him.

"Then I await your pleasure."

Captain Vernon walked away from the window to the fire. He took from the mantelpiece a candlestick which stood ready for use and held the candle to the flame until it was lit and then gave it to the foreigner.

"Follow me," he said, moving toward the door. Opening it, he pointed through the dark passage, dusty and neglected, to the door of an adjoining chamber. "There, Raphael, is the room in which you will sleep to-night. It is the chamber I reserve for my guests. It is the room, Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, that my mother occupied when she was alive. If you have any reverence for the memory of your mother, and if you have any thought of evil in your mind against me, think better of what you contemplate, and, as you walk the floor my mother trod upon long ago, deal gently with my sins and go forth from that chamber in the morning a better man."

He spoke solemnly, and in a tone that sounded to the foreigner like a warning, and pointed to the door. Monsieur Raphael, standing in the passage and holding in his hand the candle, which flared in the gusty air, trembled with a strange nervousness. He had seen Captain Vernon in moments that would have appalled most men, and he had seen him in those moments smiling at danger; but he had never seen him speak and act as he spoke and acted then. The cold wind, entering through many an unknown crevice in the walls, and whirling up the mouldy stairway, caused him to chatter and tremble beneath its influence.

"It is too cold to stand here and talk, my Horace," he said; "I must tell you good-night." As he spoke, he moved in the direction Captain Vernon had pointed out.

He was fumbling with trembling hands at the knob of the door in his endeavor to turn it.

"Will you see me to-morrow before you leave for London?" asked Captain Vernon.

"No; I shall leave too early for that. *Diable!* What has the door!"

"Turn the handle to the left. Will you go to Paris from London, or shall I see you here again, Raphael?"

The foreigner had succeeded in opening the door and was about entering. He turned to look over his shoulder at Captain Vernon as he answered him.


"When you return to Paris I shall return, but not before," he replied with a smile. "Do not have fear, therefore; we shall meet again, my old one."

And then with a "*diable!*" and a "*peste!*" the door closed on him and he left Captain Vernon standing in the passage. Left him to raise a threatening hand in the darkness and to shake it at the door the foreigner had just closed. Left him to return slowly into his room, and to sit before the fire, and to remain with his face buried in his hands until the fire had gone down, and the ghastly moon had gone down with it. Left him to the solitude of his own thoughts, and with the vision of his passionate love, and what was to come of it, hanging drearily about him, as the hours that told of the coming day clanged from the town-clock of Alderley into the cold night without.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT CAME OF MRS. ARNCLIFFE'S LETTER TO MRS. ARCHIBALD.

DULNESS on the earth, and in the sky, and in the air. Dulness in the gray clouds that hovered angrily over the house in Balfour-street in their course southward. Dulness in the streets of Alderley and in the weary looks of the birds of paradise who lounged, enveloped in furs and mantles, in the dark recesses of voluptuous carriages. Dulness in the pinched face of the houseless vagabonds shivering at street-corners, and staring at the fabulous plenty the voluptuous carriages revealed, as they rolled with a murmuring sound past him and away from him. Dulness of the most helpless kind in the face of the little tobacconist across the street at the glass door of his shop with his nose and mouth glued to the window and his hands in his pockets, and wondering as usual, in his weak way, at the mystery that was always there, but which was never accounted for. Dulness in the barber-shop around the corner where the gossips sitting before the fire, and nodding in the intervals of small talk, were engaged in the same task as the tobacconist. Dulness in the stables, and in the back parlor of the Knight and Dragon, scarcely relieved, in the latter case, by the cheerful attempts of Tom Briggs, the landlord, and a few congenial spirits to wax merry over the festive board, where, "Landlord, Fill the Flowing Bowl!" was roared out in jolly chorus in unison with Tom's constant calls for more mulled wine. Dulness in the look of every shopman in Balfour-street, gazing with



heavy eyes into the gloomy street from his shop-windows and waiting with a patient hope for the customer who never made his appearance. Dulness—but of a fierce kind—in the grinning lion's head keeping watch over the threshold of the old house, and staring, as it had stared for a century, at the dragon supporting with outstretched wings the shoe-scraper at the door. Dulness in the dark passage of the house itself, and on the creaking stairway, mouldy with the damp of years, and in the passages above, and in the room in which Captain Vernon was born. Heavily as it rested on all things elsewhere, it seemed to rest more heavily there.

The spirit of dulness was not without its influence on Captain Vernon himself. But, as he looked gloomily around the room in which he sat, and at the portrait of his dead mother above the mantelpiece, the solemn garb that nature without wore possessed no power to fill him with deeper despondency than that which already held him under its control. For that despondency came, not from what the physical eye could see and understand and guard against, but from the workings of the mind within him. There was no sun that could rise and dispel, with its brightness, the gloom that was his. There was no blessed sun that could warm him into life and drive the torpid monsters from his brain. His grief was his own, and in the sunshine and the shadow, in the long hours of the night and in the busy hours of the day, it was still with him—still following him, gaunt and unsatisfied.

Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, had been as good as his word when he had said, the night before, that he would not disturb Captain Vernon at the early hour at which the London train would leave. When that hour had come he had groped his way down the stairs, and had gone out quietly, leaving the house in Balfour-street and its oc-

cupants to their repose. When Blacker had inquired, in the morning, as to the foreigner's movements, Captain Vernon had told him that he had returned to London.

Captain Vernon had not seemed disposed to enter into any particulars in regard to the conversation that had occurred between him and the foreigner, and Blacker did not question him upon it. He was satisfied with the Captain's assertion that he had told Monsieur Raphael that he could take no further steps in the matter that had induced him to come to Alderley, and that the foreigner had, to all appearances, yielded to what he had said.

But although Captain Vernon had very little to say in regard to the interview of the night before, he was not silent on the subject upon which the old man was most pleased to speak—Mrs. Arncliffe. In what he said to Blacker, then, he spoke of the possibility of Monsieur Raphael's presence bringing sorrow to her. He said that Monsieur Raphael might, for he was a reckless man, go so far as to seek her himself and disclose what, in Captain Vernon's opinion, it was not proper to disclose yet. But he did not think that, reckless as he was, he would dare to venture on that step. For the foreigner knew that if he should do this he would not escape his—the Captain's—vengeance. Then Captain Vernon, speaking of Mrs. Arncliffe, recalled her promise to grant her sympathy and a daughter's affection to the old man with whom he was speaking. In recalling these words he also remembered that Blacker had not been to Framleigh since that conversation was held with her.

"Blacker," he said, when his thoughts turned upon this promise of Mrs. Arncliffe's, "how long has it been since you saw Bertha?"

The old man answered readily. He had the days and the hours and the minutes at his finger's ends. "Three

weeks and a day; but it seems as though it were a year, Arthur."

"I have been thinking, Blacker," Captain Vernon went on to say, kindly, "that you would like to see her again. You could have gone had you desired to do so—I have not prevented your going."

The old man passed his hand across his forehead. He was thinking of what was gone, never to come back again. Thinking of the past and of what had gone with it, and of the future and of what would come with it.

Captain Vernon had not been looking at him whilst speaking. His gaze had been turned in the direction of the gray clouds drifting across the leaden sky; and as he looked at them, he, too, thought of something that was not present with him then. Did those clouds hang as heavily above her as they did above him? he thought.

"I can go," said Blacker, replying to the Captain's last remark, "with a better spirit, to see her now, since she has said that she would give me her sympathy. I will not feel that I am a stranger to her, as I did before."

Pausing at the door, he asked Captain Vernon a question.

"Have you no message to send to Bertha, Arthur? Is there nothing you would say to her through me?"

"Nothing that you can say, Blacker. Perhaps, one day, I may have that to tell her which concerns her and me alone. But I will tell her that myself. If you say aught to her, as coming from me, ask her to pray in her goodness and purity for an unhappy wretch whose life is doomed."

An additional shade came upon the old man's face. In all that dreary November day there was no more dreary spectacle to him than that of the hopeless man who uttered this speech, and there was no more dreary thought connected with it than the meaning of the words themselves.

Leaving Captain Vernon to dwell upon his hopeless future, Blacker closed the door and went down the stairs.

The dust that clung to him as he crossed the threshold and went into the street—dust that he had gathered in his passage to the lower floor—received its usual increase from the contribution of the lion's head as the hall-door closed behind him. Dust that had lain in the silent rooms and on the walls in the house in Balfour-street for more years than the old man cared to look back upon. Dust that had come, as silently as death, from all unknown sources and had settled thickly there. Dust that was to the living man what death is to the dead—the inexorable harbinger of decay.

As Blacker stepped into the street, he walked away, little dreaming of the avaricious look cast upon him by the unhappy Mr. Creech. In the utter loneliness that possessed that miserable man, the look wherewith he greeted Blacker's appearance was miserly in a painful degree. Was not Blacker the happy possessor of the whole—or a part—of the secret that lived and moved and had its being in the house over the way? Did he not revel in the consciousness that what was a mystery to the world without was clear to him? And were not that knowledge and that consciousness, the tobacconist reflected, worth sighing for? But Blacker had no thought of the distressful little man as he walked away down the street and sought the London road.

There were no singing birds to whisper to him, as he walked now, of Bertha. There were no roses to blush by the wayside and to recall her to him. There were no balmy winds sighing around him, as he walked, filled with the story that the birds and the flowers had taught. But in his heart the memory of the birds and the flowers and the winds, and what they had said to him, lived and flour-

ished. And the memory of all those things went with him, as the birds had done, through the park-gate, along the gravelled road, and up to the marble steps of the great portico.

The Stately Martyr—a degree depressed by the weather, but still superb and unbending—listened somewhat more deferentially to the old man, as the latter inquired for Mrs. Arncliffe, than he had done on the occasion of the first visit; and it appeared from his remarks, as he ushered Blacker in, that Mrs. Arncliffe had been pleased to say that she would be always at home to the gentleman, and that when the gentleman should call he was to enter and wait until she should come down.

Did Mrs. Arncliffe feel unwell to-day? If she did, he—Blacker—would not disturb her then, but would call again. The Stately Martyr's eye looked reproachfully at the old man and intimated plainly (if eye could ever intimate anything): Don't be alarmed, my man, and don't be in a hurry. We understand our business in this shop. If we should ever make a mistake in our line, just step up to the office, and make a complaint, will you?

The reproachful eye having performed its duty, the Gorgeous Victim went up the broad stairway, on an intimation from the reproachful tongue, and returned shortly with the information that Mrs. Arncliffe would hasten down. Then, for the second time, into the darkened drawing-room walked the old man, to look, as before, at the portrait of Mr. Arncliffe in his younger days, and to wait until Mrs. Arncliffe should make her appearance.

Not long was he thus sitting and waiting before she came. Whereas she might have kept my Lord or her Grace lounging in the parlor for an hour, she made haste to prepare herself to receive the old man who had no other claim upon her regard than his unknown sorrow, and that Captain Vernon had spoken in his behalf.

The door opened, and she stood before him. He looked anxiously at the pale cheek, grown paler since their last interview—at the blue eyes with their circling red. She, too, was unhappy, he thought. She, too, wept in secret! He rose to meet her, and as he advanced toward her she extended her hand to him with a gentle smile.

"I am glad you have come to see me again," she said. "I have been expecting you for many days."

"I have come to thank you, Mrs. Arncliffe," he answered brokenly. "I have come to tell you that your kindness has filled me with gratitude for the sympathy you have expressed for me. It has been little for you to say, but it has been all to me to know that you have spoken those words!"

The hand that she had extended to him he raised to his lips. He held it for a moment and looked at her wistfully. Oh, if his lips had not been sealed! Oh, could he have spoken to her then and told her all!

They sat down, and Mrs. Arncliffe spoke in answer to what he had said.

"I sympathize with whatever suffers; but, in doing so, I do not take any credit to myself. It is right that we should feel sympathy for the unfortunate." Then, with a quiet smile, "Pardon me, sir, have you no name?"

No name? No name that she could listen to, and, listening to, remain unmoved!

Looking down, he replied, "Suffer me to remain unknown to you. Let me be to you Captain Vernon's friend and nothing more. In the future, if you desire it, I will tell you who I am. But not yet! not yet!"

She felt grieved to see what effect her words had produced; for she noted it in his trembling lip and in the moist eye that he turned upon her when he looked up.

"Forgive me," she said, "if I have asked an indiscreet question. I asked it, sir, not because I was inquisitive, but

because I thought you would be pleased to tell me your name."

The eye that was moist before was wet now with tears.

"I know," murmured the old man through his tears and with his face hidden from her with his hand—"I know that you are all goodness and pity and that I am not worthy to be your footstool. It is not I who should forgive, Mrs. Arncliffe, but—"

He hesitated and shook his head with a mournful meaning. She was close enough to him to bend over to where he was sitting, and to touch him. She placed her hand lightly upon his shoulder.

"What is the cause of your sorrow?" she said. "Is it in my power to remove it? If I can assist you I will do so. If it be any grief that might, in a measure, be assuaged by the possession of mere money, let me assist you to the extent of your need. If sympathy can assuage it, I will give that sympathy. If a daughter's affection could help to lighten it, I will give you that affection."

She did not add "for Captain Vernon's sake;" but she felt it. The old man murmured in answer, "If I were not unworthy of so pure a feeling as that of which you have spoken I could find words to thank you, Mrs. Arncliffe. Give a daughter's love to me? Speak a daughter's words of affection to me? Oh, Mrs. Arncliffe, Mrs. Arncliffe!"

He was on his knees before her chair and her hand was pressed to his forehead. Bending over him, she felt his sorrow as her own, and in her inmost heart pitied him. What great grief was it that possessed him which, in the thought of it, and in its expression in words, brought with it tears and humility? What unhappiness was it that had come to him, and, for which, her heart told her, Captain Vernon was accountable?

Old man! bending there with humble penitence in your


heart before the woman who filled your thoughts by day and your dreams by night, did you feel the forgiving tear falling from her pitying eyes upon your guilty head? Woman! leaning like an angel of mercy above the old man at your feet, did you, in that moment, dream of the truth, and did you read aright that mystery which his tears revealed? Recording angel! were those tears accepted in partial atonement for a wrong that belonged to the past, and which, when the future should bring retribution with it, would still be rife with a sorrowful remorse for what the grave concealed? Spirit of chance! mingling in our mortal life, redressing wrong when least expected, and making all things clearer as time goes on, was it thou that didst bring these two together, but with a dark parting between them—was it thou or was it destiny?

Desolation and weariness of heart within the darkened parlor; desolation and weariness of nature without. Tears falling from human eyes in the autumnal decay of a human life; dead leaves falling from the windy trees in the year's dying throes. Shadowy clouds lowering in the vast space wherein dwell the eternal stars and veiling the blessed sun from the wailing, expectant earth; shadows resting darkly and heavily upon the human hearts and shutting out a glimpse of the awful meeting which was to bring tears with it for what was to come with it, and which was never more to yield to parting!

The seconds passed into a minute before Mrs. Arncliffe gently withdrew her hand from the old man's clasp and said to him, "Forget your grief and rise from your knees. Perhaps the future will bring consolation with it."

He rose slowly and resumed his seat. His hand rested for a moment upon his brow and an uncertain look came upon his face.

"God will not permit me to suffer always," he said ab-



stractedly. "He will forgive me for what I have done, and make me happy yet, I trust."

"Yes, yes; you will be happy if, in committing wrong, you have repented. Was it a great wrong that you grieve for?"

"A greater wrong than you could understand if I were to tell you of it, Mrs. Arncliffe. A greater wrong than, I hope, it will ever be yours to suffer!"

His voice was tremulous with suppressed feeling. Wishing to spare him the pain of speaking further upon the subject Mrs. Arncliffe changed the topic of conversation.

"You have not spoken to me of your friend, Captain Vernon. He is well, I hope."

"Yes, Mrs. Arncliffe, quite well."

Her next question was one to bring a slight color to her cheek.

"Is he very unhappy?"

"Very unhappy."

"Yes; he spoke to me of his unhappiness when he was here. So young, too, and so strong to resist the ills of life!" Her voice was broken by some secret thought and her eyelashes drooped upon her cheek.

"Now that I remember it, he gave me a message to give to you," said Blacker.

The blue eyes looked up wonderingly into his face for a moment and then disappeared behind their silken fringe. What message could Captain Vernon have sent to her? she thought.

"What did Captain Vernon tell you to say to me?" she asked.

"He asks you to pray for a wretch whose life is doomed."

She stared vacantly at the old man when he said this, and through her half-parted lips came one word—

"Doomed?"

"This is what he told me to say to you, Mrs. Arncliffe."

From her neck to her brow a deadly pallor spread as if the shadow of death were upon her. Her hand fell helplessly to her side, and her eyes were fixed upon the old man with a dismal look in their blue depths. For, in the words that she listened to, she read the dark story that was to find its sequel in—what?

Her passionate love had eyes to see him in that moment forsaken by the world and cursing his destiny. Unhappy! and she away from him! Suffering! and refusing, in his obstinate nature, to pray for forgiveness!

The old man observed her agitation and his heart smote him for having caused it by speaking so abruptly. She was startled by what he had said; her nervous nature had been shocked by the picture he had drawn in his words; she was ill in consequence—these were the thoughts that flashed through his mind. He rose, and in an instant was at her side. "Forgive me," he said, "for having spoken so abruptly to you, Mrs. Arncliffe. I had not thought of the sudden effect of my words. I was but repeating Captain Vernon's own language."

The little hand sought the pale brow and brushed the fair hair backward. Gradually, as she regained her composure, the whiteness died away and a woman's other resort came to her aid. The crimson tide flushed what had been pale before and suffused her eyes with an invisible moisture. "Oh, sir," she murmured, "do not think strangely of this! Impute it to my weak, weak nature!" Then with her handkerchief to her face she wept bitterly. Amid her tears she was speaking—speaking to ward off any suspicion that might rest in the old man's mind in regard to her agitation. "If you knew my nature, you would understand why I have so forgotten myself! There is not a weaker woman alive than I! Tell Captain Vernon that,

if my prayers can avail him, and if he ask for them, I will pray that he may be unhappy no more !”

“When I return to him I will tell him this ; and if an angel’s prayers can benefit him, yours, I know, will not be without their influence. Let me go to him, now that I have caused you to weep, who, alone, have spoken kindly to me. Forget, in my absence, how unworthy I am of your sympathy, and think forgivingly of an old man who is happy in the reflection that you have spoken to him as you have done to-day.”

Gently lifting to his lips the hand that lay idly in her lap, he kissed it and murmured, “Good-bye, Mrs. Arncliffe, and may Heaven reward you for your goodness and charity !”

From the folds of the handkerchief she said to him, “Do not tell Captain Vernon of these tears. Do not let him think lightly of me for my weakness and foolishness by telling him of these tears.”

“No, Mrs. Arncliffe. He shall never know from me how the tears came to your eyes through act of mine.”

And then he moved to the door and opened it. He stood upon the threshold for a moment to look lovingly at the bowed figure sitting in the chair before the cheerful fire—sitting and sobbing like a child. He stood there, to put his hand to his brow and to murmur an inaudible benediction upon her ; and then, closing the door after him, he walked through the great hall, where the Stately Martyr (just aroused from sleep) bowed him out.

Left to herself, what thoughts came to Mrs. Arncliffe ? The fulness of the knowledge of what the old man had meant when he had told her that Captain Vernon was his own enemy and the worst enemy of those who cared for him ! The understanding of that nature whose tortures of mind were her tortures—whose hopes were her hopes—whose destiny, for good or for evil, was to be her destiny !

Happily, what that destiny was to be was hidden from her then. Happily, the tears shed by her at that moment were for what was of the present, and not for that greater sorrow which the future held in its keeping.

When calmness had come upon her, and when she felt strong enough to appear before the household, she went into the hall. The Martyr and the Victim, whiling away the weary hours in lolling at ease upon the sofa and in kicking at each other's shins in an amicable way, straightened themselves as she appeared.

"Has the mail come yet, James?" she said, addressing the latter.

"Yes, ma'am."

Then she went up the stairway, leaving the two splendid appendages to human pomps and vanities to gaze at her retreating figure, and to observe that every time the old 'un came to see Mrs. Arncliffe she didn't look happy after he had gone.

What time, Mrs. Arncliffe, turning over the letters upon her table, found the one that she expected. A letter in Mrs. Archibald's handwriting. She held it open in her lap for a little while, after breaking the seal, fearing to look into it, and wondering what motherly advice it contained. How did Mrs. Archibald meet the evil? How did she receive the knowledge that her daughter had permitted a guilty love to creep into her heart?

A few minutes of indecision, and then, with trembling hands, she read what it contained. It was a short letter, and was evidently written in haste.

"'THE RESIDENCY,' November 26th.

"Do not impute my delay in writing to you to anger, on my part, at the disclosure your last letter contained. I do not reproach you, my poor Bertha; for if you have com-

mitted wrong, it is a wrong that you have not committed intentionally, and which, so far as your ability will permit you to do, I know you will strive to redeem. I have not written sooner in answer to you because I am still on a bed of sickness. I am scarcely well enough to write to-day, and but for the urgent necessity that appeals to me I would not attempt to do so. But I feel that it would be criminal in me to delay longer in giving you that advice which you ask of me. Forgive me, therefore, if this letter should be wanting, in your opinion, in those expressions of affection that you have, and always shall have, a right to expect from me.

"I love you as much now as I did when you were a happy girl beneath my roof in those old days you so much regret.

"And now, my child, give me your attention while I point out what I deem to be your duty. I cannot advise you to reveal this miserable love to Mr. Arncliffe. You know your husband better than I do. Some men would kill their wives for this. Some would disgrace them (and themselves) forever by publishing their shame in an open court. You know Mr. Arncliffe better than I ever could know him, and you can better judge of the policy of sharing this fearful secret with him. But, if I know your heart, you will shrink from this.

"Then leave the scene where this fatal love was engendered. Fly at once from the presence of the man who has destroyed your peace of mind as you would from the plague. Go, if you can, to the Continent—to Italy—anywhere, so that you are relieved of the presence of that which it is death for you to look upon.

"Oh, Bertha! my heart bleeds for you, for what has come to you! My poor, poor Bertha!

"If Mr. Arncliffe should object, say that you *must* go. If

you cannot gain his permission to go abroad, go to some friend in the country where time, and absence from the object of your mad love, will tend to remove the thought of him from your heart. For, if you die in the effort, you *must* conquer it, or it will conquer you!

"And now, darling, good-bye. I am too weak to write more—too weak to write as I would wish to write.

"Do but your duty, my child, and God will assist you in its performance.

"If you could but come to me, Bertha! Good-bye, and God bless you.

"Your loving mother,

"JANE ARCHIBALD."

Mrs. Arncliffe's heart was lighter, after reading Mrs. Archibald's letter, than it had been since she first felt that she loved Captain Vernon. The advice that it contained pointed out a way by which she hoped to conquer in the struggle that beset her.

Yes; she would go away. She would flee from that fatal love, to entertain which was wrong, and shame, and guilt. She would do her duty, though she should never set eyes on him again.

She wrote to Mr. Arncliffe, acquainting him with her intention to visit Lady Eden. At her friend's house she could remain until she should make other arrangements for a more distant removal. If Mr. Arncliffe should return suddenly to Framleigh, Eden Lodge was but a short distance from Alderley. An hour's ride would bring her home at his bidding.

She rang the bell, and when the Victim appeared in answer to it she gave orders that the carriage should be prepared immediately for a journey and that the housekeeper should attend her. With her maid she set about arranging

her wardrobe. This was completed by the time the housekeeper came in answer to her summons.

"Mrs. Carr," she said to her, quietly, "you are aware that Lady Eden has frequently invited me to visit her? I have mentioned that to you, I believe?"

"Yes, Mrs. Arncliffe, I remember that you have."

"Well, I have sent for you to inform you that I have determined to accept that invitation. I leave the house in your charge. If any letters should come here from Mr. Arncliffe send them to me, or if you should hear of his intended arrival write to me immediately. Here are the keys. Bear this in mind, Mrs. Carr, that I do not wish it known, beyond this house, where I am going. Do not fail to warn the servants of this fact."

The housekeeper's large eyes opened in wonder at this speech.

"Won't we have the yule-log burning in Framleigh this Christmas, ma'am?" she said. "It will be a strange Christmas that does not find the yule-log aglow in the house of the Arncliffes. Even when Mr. Arncliffe was a young bachelor the old halls used to echo with the shouts of the squires and gentlemen from London, on Christmas nights."

Mrs. Arncliffe, busy in locking up the little articles of value about the room, concealed her face from the honest eyes that looked at her from the door, for she felt that its pallor would betray her to the housekeeper. There was an awful sense upon her that, as she fled from her guilty love, so was she fleeing from her husband's roof; and, although the action was blameless and void of guilt, she could not look unmoved upon the face of the venerable woman who had nursed that husband and who was born, and who would die, under the protection of his house.

"If I should be here when Christmas comes round," she

said, still with her face concealed, "we will celebrate Christmas as usual. I leave Framleigh in your charge. Remember what I have told you in regard to the servants. Now leave me, Mrs. Carr, and—good-bye." She held out her hand to the housekeeper who took it and kissed it.

"God bless you, ma'am," she said, "and bring you back soon again. You have been a good mistress to us here in Framleigh, and you are an honor to Mr. Arncliffe's house."

Then she went out to take charge, from that moment, of Framleigh and of what it contained. But as the door closed on her, Mrs. Arncliffe buried her face in the pillows and wept at the thought of her words—"and you are an honor to Mr. Arncliffe's house."

A knock at the door, and the Gorgeous Victim appeared and said in a lugubrious voice to the pretty waiting-maid, who had answered the knock, that the carriage awaited Mrs. Arncliffe. The Victim's lugubrious tones were echoed as Susan informed Mrs. Arncliffe of the purport of his message, and the two gazed wistfully at each other.

For be it known that it had already spread in the household that Mrs. Arncliffe was about to leave Framleigh on a visit to Eden Lodge and the Victim and the pretty waiting-maid were very much greived thereat, for Susan was to accompany her mistress. Gone, then, were the sly skirmishing in passages and the pleasant delights of little three-cornered notes (slightly the worse for grease) coming up weekly from the cook below, wherein it was indistinctly set forth how Mrs. Wilkins would be happy to meet Mr. James Tarber, or Miss Susan Poppe (as the case might be) at a little sworry in her room. Gone, the delicious sworrysts themselves and Mrs. Wilkins's delicious tea. Gone, the hints indulged in by Mrs. Wilkins on these occasions—hints that looked to a possible merging of Poppe into

Tarber, and which usually resulted in Mr. Tarber's propounding the query, "When *shall* it be, Susan?" and in the pretty waiting-maid's reddening and answering, "Now, Mr. Tarber, *do* don't be a fool!"

In a little while, prepared for the journey and accompanied by the maid, Mrs. Arncliffe entered the carriage. She threw herself back in her seat and closed her eyes to restrain the tears that were pressing through the lids. Then, amid the farewells of the household, the carriage rolled away.

For an instant, as they stopped at the park-gate, waiting for the keeper, Mrs. Arncliffe looked back toward the house. In that instant she saw the house itself and the bare trees and the white statues,—some with the beckoning hands, and some with the hands warning away; and she saw, too, the shaft of the fountain that was voiceless now. And upon the great house lowered an angry cloud, hanging like a pall, in that dreary November day, above it. Through the leafless branches of the solemn trees soughed the sad November wind. From the fountain came no murmur of dancing waters. From the dead pale lips of the inanimate marble there was no voice to speak to her—only the deceitful smile upon the faces of those that beckoned, Come, and the sullen stare of those that pointed, Away. She saw these things in the one backward look which she gave ere the carriage passed out into the highway. Then she reclined again in her seat and murmured, "If I do wrong, pardon me, Heaven! What I do, I do for the best!"

CHAPTER XVI.

MONSIEUR RAPHAEL PAYS CAPTAIN VERNON ANOTHER VISIT.

IN the sombre twilight in which sits Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, come the phantoms of a giant despair. In the quiet of the house in Balfour-street comes the hostile challenge, falling with an ominous sound upon his ear, of the iron knocker on the hall-door, where the dust from the lion's head settles silently upon the man who knocks.

Blacker, gazing quietly out of the window into the street, turns and looks inquiringly at Captain Vernon.

"If it should be—the man from Paris, are you at home to him?" he asks.

Captain Vernon, sitting with arms folded and with frowning face, answers hoarsely, "Yes! If it be Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme let him come up. Perhaps we may finally come to understand one another."

Then the old man walks down, to return shortly and to usher in Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris.

The cigarette is, as usual, between the foreigner's lips, and the light of the fire falling upon him reveals the usual sneer upon his face. A little more cruel to-night than formerly; a little more eloquent of evil, perhaps.

Captain Vernon, without turning to look at him, says, "So you have come again, Monsieur Raphael?"

"*Peste!* Yes! I said that I would do myself the pleasure of visiting my Horace again and—*diable!*—I am here!"

Captain Vernon does not give any answer to this; but he speaks to Blacker standing in an uncertain way near the door.

"Lights, Blacker; and leave us," is what he says.

The old man lights the candle and places it upon the table. As he does so he fixes his eye, menacingly, upon the foreigner's face. Then he leaves the room, and Captain Vernon is left alone with his guest. The foreigner seats himself. He has observed the old man's look and he questions Captain Vernon. "Pardon me, my comrade," he says, "who is the old one? Is he insane? *Peste!* You do not keep maniacs around you!"

"That gentleman is a friend of mine, Monsieur Raphael. He is as sane as you or I. Indeed, he is probably a saner man than either of us."

"Ah? very good, and very well!"

The sneering face is hidden in a puff of smoke, but the snaky eyes peer through it for all that as they rest upon Captain Vernon. With nothing of him visible but his glittering eyes and a diamond pin that he wears in his scarf, Monsieur Raphael speaks again.

"You have been well, my Horace, since my unceremonious departure the other morning? *Diable!* You did not doubt my friendship because I omitted bidding you farewell? I cannot regulate the trains, you know, my comrade."

Captain Vernon, for the first time, turns to observe him. "Raphael," he says abruptly, "what brought you from London, to-night?"

The expression upon the face of Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, up to this time, has been the look that a cat wears when playing with a mouse; but when Captain Vernon puts this question to him it assumes the expression the cat's face wears when he is cloyed with play and deter-

mines to eat the mouse. The sneering smile vanishes, for a moment, and gives way to a hard, cruel look, as he answers, "Business brought me from London, Captain Vernon."

"Business with me?"

"Yes; business with you."

Captain Vernon turns his chair slowly, so as to face the foreigner as he sits; and the two men, for the second time, look at each other, with the table between them. With his arms folded before him, the Captain waits until Monsieur Raphael shall speak again. The foreigner is not slow to do this.

"How long have we known each other, my Horace?" he asks.

"Why do you ask that question?"

"*Bah!* Shall I answer for you? Eight months to-night! Under what circumstances did we make each other's acquaintance?"

Captain Vernon half rises from his chair and answers, with an angry frown upon his brow, "Have I not told you not to revive that affair? Have I not said that it would be dangerous to revive it?"

"Yes, my Horace; but I revive it because it is my business to revive it. I revive it because it is necessary that we should come to some agreement with each other. *Beste!* I am not a rash man, but I do not fear danger!"

He places his hand into his pocket after saying this and draws a newspaper from it. It does not require a second glance to inform Captain Vernon that it is the *Times* newspaper. Unfolding it slowly the foreigner looks over it until he has found what he is in search of. Then he folds it into a smaller space and lays it before him.

He is very cool and self-possessed in his movements; for when he has arranged the newspaper to his liking he takes

out his pocket-book and tears out a sheet, and, with a pinch of tobacco from his vest-pocket, proceeds to roll up a cigarette.

He has placed the cigarette between his lips and is looking at Captain Vernon.

Captain Vernon, who has been observing his movements, has become impatient. He is frowning darkly upon the smiling foreigner.

"Well!" he says abruptly.

Monsieur Raphael removes the cigarette to blow the smoke through his nostrils, and to remark, "Pardon me, my Horace, it is not well. It is—pardon me again—bad."

He has taken the newspaper in his hand and he holds the cigarette between his fingers.

"When I asked you just now," he proceeds to say, emphasizing his remarks with the hand which holds the cigarette between its fingers,—“when I asked you under what circumstances we first knew each other, you frowned and told me it was dangerous to refer to those circumstances,—did you not?”

"I told you that then, Raphael, and I repeat it now!"

"Very good, and very well! When you asked me what brought me from London, to-night, what answer did I give?"

"You said that you came on business."

"Business—and with whom?"

"Pshaw! Business with me! Speak out, man!"

The foreigner lifts his hand with an expostulating gesture. "Not so fast, my Horace," he says smilingly. "You are strong I am aware, and brave; but pardon me, if I say again you have not the coolness."

He handles the newspaper delicately and turns it over and over in his hands. The angry look deepens in Captain Vernon's eyes as the foreigner does this and he strikes the

table heavily with his hand. "Raphael, do you wish to play with me! What does that newspaper contain?" he says.

The foreigner goes on speaking as though he has not heard Captain Vernon's words.

"When I told you that business brought me from London to this place, to-night, I told you what was true, my comrade. When I asked you under what circumstances we made each other's acquaintance, I wished to recall to your mind something connected with that business. Shall I recall those circumstances, my good Horace?"

"No. Let them be unspoken. Proceed with your business!" He leans his head upon his hand and looks down and listens whilst the foreigner is speaking.

"Do you read the *Times*?"

"No. I read nothing."

"Then you did not see this?" the foreigner says, thrusting the newspaper under Captain Vernon's eye and pointing to a paragraph it contains.

A slight pallor comes upon Captain Vernon's face as he reads—if the shade that comes upon a brave man's face when he understands a peril, but does not fear it, may be called "pallor."

He rises from the table, without looking at the foreigner, and walks rapidly backward and forward in the room. He is thinking of how that peril, which has been made known to him, in the newspaper that the foreigner has shown him, can be avoided. Monsieur Raphael is thinking of his five thousand francs, and of how they can be regained. The foreigner breaks the silence.

"Will you return to Paris now, my good Horace?" he says with his sneering smile. Standing by the table Captain Vernon once more brings his hand down heavily upon it, and says, "No! a thousand times no! More than ever if I die for it, shall I remain here!"

“Then—pardon me, my poor Horace—you will suffer for your obstinacy.”

Captain Vernon is walking again. He cannot see the wolfish expression deepening about the foreigner's mouth, and the cunning look growing more cunning in his snaky eyes, as he says this. He does not see them; but they are there nevertheless.

What threat do Monsieur Raphael's words conceal? What danger for Captain Vernon do the wolfish smile and cunning look reveal?

The silence between the two men in the room is unbroken for a few moments, as Captain Vernon walks and walks. His mind is dwelling, in these moments, on the question the foreigner has asked him and on the necessity that exists that he should leave Alderley and go to Paris.

Leave Alderley, and leave behind him the woman, wanting whose presence life would be a hideous dream? Go forth to his old existence of wrong and error to fight the world, and to be persecuted by it and conquered by it? Leave *her* presence, and follow the man who sits at the table with a smile upon his lip and hatred in his heart? No! no! Let his destiny overtake him! Let them come and drag him forth from his father's old home, the scorn and jest of meaner things! Let them hunt him down; but he will not go to Paris!

The old house is full of strange voices that speak the language of decay from dusty passage and mouldy stairs. The night without warns him in the voice of the dreary wind moaning around the gables. The shutters creaking upon their rusty hinges in the darkness have their story to tell him. The fire crackling on the hearth is not voiceless to urge him to his duty. And the voices that come to him from these are a warning to go away! To flee from the shadow of his father's house, anywhere! To go back, if

need be, to the life he has left and to avoid the evil that awaits him here!

Monsieur Raphael, smoking and waiting until Captain Vernon shall have sat down again, gazes at him through the smoke with an abstracted look. His mind, too, is dwelling on the information the newspaper contains. What does Captain Vernon mean by refusing to return with him to Paris? What does my Horace mean by denying him his confidence? Does my good Horace wish to shake him off; does he intend—*peste!*—to remain and secure the gains arising from the knowledge that he and Monsieur Raphael possess in common? And does he intend—*diable!*—that Monsieur Raphael's creditors shall besiege him—Monsieur Raphael—for those five thousand francs? If so, very good, and very well!

Captain Vernon is standing before the fire and leaning upon the mantelpiece.

"Raphael!" he says deliberately, "you have heard my decision. Good or bad, my decision is to remain here. What do you say to that?"

"I say nothing to that. But I say that you deceived me when you wrote that note to me in Paris last month."

"If I deceived you then, Raphael, I deceived myself. If I said then that I would gain money by divulging that knowledge, I again deceived myself. It is useless to struggle against destiny."

"*Bah!* There is no such thing as destiny! There may be a cursed, obstinate chance; but there is no such thing as destiny. *Peste!* You make me shudder when you speak of destiny!"

"If I remain here," Captain Vernon goes on solemnly, "and if by remaining here my fate is to be decided here, I will not of my own volition leave this house in which my boyhood was passed until I shall go where man has no

power to persecute. If my life has been a wrong one I shall die, as I have lived, scorning them. Right or wrong, Raphael, these are my words to you."

The foreigner makes no answer to this, except to touch the paper, he holds in his hand, lightly, and to say, "And this, my Horace?"

"Even that will not shake my resolution. I have made up my mind that, some day or other, what is to be the end of this will come upon me, whether I seek to avoid it or not. I have been a fugitive long enough. I will rest here until I am wanted."

He leans his head upon his arm, and from the dusty passage and mouldy stairs come the voices to him—

Away!

There are other eyes than those of the foreigner looking upon him, as he leans upon the mantelpiece—the eyes of the portrait on the wall—the eyes that looked upon him in those old days of innocence when he prayed at his mother's side!

Monsieur Raphael is still thinking of those five thousand francs.

"If you can afford to relinquish that affair, Captain Horace Vernon," he says, "and if you can afford to throw to the dogs a thousand pounds and remain in this old barracks, you have no cursed debt hanging over, and you can do so. But I, my old one, cannot afford to do that. I must return to Paris and—to my creditors. *Peste!* What shall I tell them when they say to me, 'Monsieur Raphael, where are our five thousand francs?' *Diable!* Shall I say to them that you did not fulfil your promise, my comrade?"

"Say to them what you please! I tell you again and again that I will go no further with it. It was *your* proposition to secure money from my intended action; but you must abandon your intention as I have abandoned mine."

"You have become virtuous, my poor Horace—I repeat it! You have become an imbecile, a beast, a poltroon, my Horace! If you fear the consequences leave the affair to me. I have no fear—*diable!*—I have no weakness!" the foreigner says scornfully.

Captain Vernon, walking to the side of Monsieur Raphael, lays his hand upon his shoulder and holds him in his grasp. He looks down into the foreigner's eyes with that dangerous look that sometimes comes to him, and says slowly, "Does Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme know me well enough to believe that when I say a thing I mean what I say?"

"*Diable!* Yes! Take your hand from my shoulder, Captain Vernon!"

The foreigner struggles to disengage himself from the iron hold of Captain Vernon's hand, and his snaky eyes glitter and twinkle with a warning light. But he struggles in vain. If he were the veriest child he could not be more helpless in the hands of the man who holds him.

Captain Vernon, tightening his hold, stares fiercely at him and goes on speaking.

"You believe that when I say a thing I mean it—very well! Now when I tell you, Monsieur Raphael, that I am not an imbecile, or a beast, or a poltroon, will you believe me?"

"*Peste!* Am I a wooden man that you hold me thus! Let me go, I say!"

"Answer my question—do you believe me?"

The foreigner's face is red and pale, in succession, with his struggles. His left hand is fumbling suspiciously in his vest. His eye has the deadly light in it that comes to the *cobra de capello* when he is about to strike; but he answers sullenly, "*Diable d'enfer!* Yes! You will pay me for this, my comrade!"

Captain Vernon is watching the movement of the foreigner's left hand, as he speaks.

"You came to this place from Paris," he says, "against my will and without consulting my wishes—did you not? Answer, and quickly!"

"I came here because I wanted to do so, my—"

"Without my consent and against my wishes?"

"You say it—yes."

"When you came here what did I tell you?"

"Take your hand from my shoulder and I will tell you what you told me."

Captain Vernon shakes him roughly. As he thus shakes him, something drops, with a hard metallic sound, from the foreigner's bosom to the floor. Captain Vernon looks down upon it, lying at his feet. It glistens and glitters as the light from the fire falls upon it. Kicking it away from him toward the fireplace he discovers what it is. It is Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme's poniard. This is the object for which the foreigner has been fumbling in his vest.

"Take your hand from your bosom. Raphael, and listen to me. Your poniard is at my feet and it can be of no use to you. Take your hand from your bosom and answer me!"

The foreigner's teeth rattle with the shaking that Captain Vernon has just given him, but his eye glitters with a more deadly light. Perhaps Captain Vernon, standing over him and crushing him with the weight of his hand, does not see this look; perhaps he does and does not allow it to frighten him. He repeats his last question.

"When you came here what did I tell you?"

"You told me many things! *Diable!* Is it that I must remember everything that is told to me!"

"You must remember this. What did I tell you, Monsieur Raphael?"

"You said that I was a bold man; and you said what is true, my brave!"

"Why were you a bold man?"

"*Bah!* For coming here, you said! You will pay me for this questioning, my old one!"

"Did I tell you that, in coming here, you have committed the boldest act of your life?"

"It is not to me to contradict you! *Peste!* Will you release me!"

"Answer me—yes, or no!"

"Yes!"

Captain Vernon loosens his hold upon Monsieur Raphael's shoulder, but his hand still rests there. He has not done with him yet, apparently, for he continues speaking to him.

"You came here, then, against my wishes, and without my permission," he says, in his measured way. "Are you my master that you must follow me and see me perform my work?"

The foreigner attempts to rise from his chair, as he says, "When you shall have fatigued yourself with asking me questions I will go and leave you;" but Captain Vernon does not permit him to rise.

"You will go when I permit you, not before. Remain quiet, while I speak to you!"

The foreigner utters an imprecation and sits down again. He looks at his poniard, glistening on the floor, with an eager look.

"You said just now," Captain Vernon goes on, "that you came to me on business, and that we would come to an agreement, did you not?"

"Yes, I said that. We *will* come to an agreement before we part—a final agreement, my comrade!"

"Very well. Now what do you propose?"

"I propose that, since you have caused me to borrow five thousand francs on a promise you gave, you give me that sum to repay my cursed creditors."

"Very well. But how would I procure that sum, supposing I agree to that proposition?"

"*Diable!* Sell this old barn!"

The hand tightens on the foreigner's shoulder once more, but Monsieur Raphael raises his hand deprecatingly.

"*Bah!*" he says, "let that pass! I will make another proposition."

"Go on."

"I propose that, since you do not desire to proceed further in the matter that brought you here, you resign affairs to me."

"Go on. What more?"

"If you have scruples, I have none. If you fear consequences, I do not. If you have tender regards for weak natures—*bah!*—I have none! Resign the affair into my hands and permit me to gain back my five thousand francs. That is my proposition, and if you accept it I promise to leave you alone in the future. Do you agree to that, my Horace?"

"You mean that you are to go to the lady, whom I was villain enough to come here to persecute, and force her to give *you* money for the secret that I was a worse villain for allowing you to wring from me!" Captain Vernon pauses for a moment to breathe heavily, and the foreigner mutters "*diable!*"

"You mean that your final proposition, to which you ask *my* consent, is that you go to her and thrust your reptile presence upon her, and demand money from her, as *my* friend, and bring tears to her eyes for that of which she, in her innocence, is guiltless! Is that the proposition you would make to me?"

The foreigner, according to his own confession, and according to Captain Vernon's opinion, is a bold man; but he is not a bold enough man to look steadfastly into the dark eyes that are glaring on him now. His lips—from which the sneering smile has departed—are paler, too, than usual, as he opens them to answer. But from his mouth comes no sound, and the muttered word that dies upon his lips takes the form of "*peste!*"

Captain Vernon, grasping him more firmly by the collar of his coat, lifts him up and holds him at arm's length facing him.

Monsieur Raphael, glancing at the steel that shines under the influence of the fire, waits for what is to come and fastens his metallic eyes upon Captain Vernon's face.

Holding him away from him and looking down upon him, Captain Vernon says, "Villain as you are, Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, you should have hesitated before making that proposition to me!"

The foreigner has folded the newspaper that lay upon the table and is putting it in his breast pocket. When he has done this he taps his breast gently, and says, with a return of his sneering manner, "Let Captain Vernon remember the knowledge that I possess and let him refrain from calling names! *Diable!* If I am a villain what are you?"

"Is this your final proposition?" Captain Vernon says, not noticing the foreigner's last remark.

"This is my final proposition."

"Is the business that brought you here ended with this?"

"It is."

"Then, hear my answer. If you should ever, by word or letter, approach Mrs. Arncliffe or utter one syllable to her that might cause her pain; and further, if you should

ever, under any pretext, approach her so that her eyes should light upon your face; if you should ever pollute, by your presence, the air that she breathes, if I live, Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, you shall die. That is my answer to your proposition. Now go, before I do you an injury."

He drops his hand from Monsieur Raphael's shoulder and turns to move away. But at that moment the foreigner's hissing voice falls upon his ear.

"*Bah!* This is not sense that you speak, my Horace! This is weakness—this is love!"

In the next instant Captain Vernon has turned and has seized Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme and has hurled him against the opposite wall. The blood spouting from the foreigner's nose falls upon his coat and dyes it of a dark crimson hue. He rises and his eye falls upon the poniard. He springs toward it; but in that moment Captain Vernon, placing his foot upon it, points to the door.

"Go, Raphael, and do not tempt destiny," he says. "Our paths are apart henceforth. Do your worst, but do not cross my path again."

The foreigner, stanching the blood flowing from his nostrils, moves toward the door. The sneer upon his lip is the sneer that comes upon the wolf when he exhibits his teeth before biting. The look in his snaky eye is the look that springs from the serpent who is coiled for the attack.

"You have made your choice, my Horace! Now let your destiny save you!" he says.

Captain Vernon, standing motionless, still points to the door. The foreigner, wrapping his cloak about him, crosses the threshold and closes the door after him. Not to occupy the guest-chamber of the old house that night, but to shiver through the dark passage and to creep like a guilty thing down the mouldy stairway; and so to walk into the



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cold street, with the dust hanging about him. To do this, and to loiter, suspected of policemen, around the station, waiting until the train for London shall leave—waiting and shivering in the night, and plotting against the man whom he had left standing before the fire in the house in Balfour-street and pointing to the door.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH CAPTAIN VERNON MEETS AN ACQUAINTANCE.

IT was destined to Mr. Creech, that morning, that his hours of vigil at the door of his shop were again to be fruitful of content. His mind had been distracted, far toward morning on the night before, in witnessing from the window of his room the tall form of Captain Vernon, who stood by the mantelpiece in the house opposite engaged in conversation with a man who, the little tobacconist was almost prepared to affirm, *was* surely a foreigner. But however strong was his curiosity on that occasion, and however praiseworthy the motive that impelled him to stare for hours, by the town clock, at what was transpiring in the house in Balfour-street, it is not to be denied that he had yielded, about the time the clock rang out the hour of ten, to a weakness which besets frail mortality. It would be worse than useless to deny that the little tobacconist had fallen asleep at his post.

When he awoke—which phenomenon of waking was partly the result of a depressed feeling, consequent upon a weakness about the back and a chilliness about the legs, and partly owing to a noise that bore a suspicious resemblance to the jar of a violently closed door—he awoke to the knowledge that the fellow-mystery to the old mystery who lived over the way had departed wrapped up in a great cloak which concealed him from head to foot. He awoke to this knowledge, and to curse his sleepy head, and to stare, until the night-shadows had closed around him, at

the fellow-mystery walking with hasty steps down the street, and then to turn his gaze toward the window, through which the usual mystery might be seen, walking, with his head bent upon his bosom, backward and forward for an hour after the departure of his cloaked companion.

The little tobacconist, thinking and watching, saw the gray dawn lighting up, with its accustomed fires, the eastern sky, and saw, also, the light extinguished in the old house. And then, with an uncomfortable feeling about him as of having been careless and remiss in the duty he owed himself (and the gossips), he had gone to sleep to dream of Captain Vernon braining, with an awful expression of countenance, the man enveloped in the cloak and of his cutting off the stranger's head and sending it over by Mary Agnes on a curiously wrought dish with his compliments, and of his—Mr. Creech's—examining the head and discovering amid a flood of tears that it belonged to his only brother, who had left Portsmouth years ago on a trip to the Gold Coast of Africa and concerning whose after fortunes nothing had since been known.

When the little man awoke, in the morning, with this wretched delusion still fresh upon his mind, it is not to be supposed that he felt any the better for it. He had an appalling belief that he had become, through the events of that night, a sharer in the mystery of Balfour-street; and he had a terrible idea, drawn from his dream, that somehow or other somebody or other, at some time or other, would call upon him to offer his testimony in open court in behalf of the Crown and against the prisoner at the bar; in which it would be expected that he would explain to the satisfaction of the jury at what time the foreign-looking gentleman in the cloak had reached, and at what time he had left, the house in Balfour-street, and also any other little circumstance relative to the case, and not irrelevant

to the point which the Crown expected to prove, namely; that the guilt (if any there should be) would be found, after a full investigation, to rest upon the prisoner at the bar.

It was with this awful sense of being responsible to somebody, then, that Mr. Creech took his accustomed post of observation in the morning; and much as he desired that the door of the old house would open and reveal something in its opening, his teeth fairly shook in his head as he saw his wish fulfilled in the opening of the door, followed by the appearance of Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service.

His terror was not lessened when he observed that Captain Vernon, instead of walking away as usual, fixed his eye upon him standing at his shop-door, and, after a moment's hesitation, crossed the street, coming toward him.

Mr. Creech remained in a sort of stupor whilst Captain Vernon, stepping lightly upon the curb-stone, neared the door, and when the Captain lifted the latch and entered, he leaned against the counter in a helpless way, and pitiously to behold.

Captain Vernon's remark to him, on walking into the shop, was practical enough in its nature to disarm terror, for he simply said, "Cigars, my man."

Although the cigars were forthcoming, they made their appearance in so unusual a manner, some rolling away to the right and to the left on the counter and others betaking themselves under the counter into all sorts of dark and unknown places, whilst the remainder lingered, in a species of legerdemain, between the little man's fingers (all of which being due to the trembling of his hand), that Captain Vernon, looking at him, fell into a commonly credited belief that affixed the affliction of light-headedness to the unhappy cigar-vender, and said to him, "You, too, look like an object of the world's persecutions. If you are insane

and unfit to gain your livelihood, why do you not go to an asylum?" and then walked out, leaving Mr. Creech to collect his scattered senses and to recall the circumstances connected with the visit paid to his shop by the mystery.

(It is worthy of remark, in this connection—and it is here stated—that in later days, and long after Captain Vernon had ceased to be a subject of surmise, the gossips were accustomed to call upon Mr. Creech to narrate what had occurred on the memorable occasion of the purchase of the cigars and to repeat, to the best of his recollection, the exact words used by Captain Vernon while taking the cigars from the counter. On which occasions Mr. Creech was in the habit of saying that, to the best of his recollection, Captain Vernon had asked him if he—Captain Vernon—did not look like a persecuted wretch; saying he was insane and unfit to gain an honest living; and also whether he—Mr. Creech—would confer a favor upon him by directing him to the nearest asylum.)

When Captain Vernon left the tobacconist's shop he sought the livery-stables. The proprietor was, as usual, lounging at the entrance and smoking a short pipe.

As the Captain approached him he touched his cap and said, "Do you want Black Dick to-day, sir?"

"Yes; is he disengaged?"

"That's what he is sir. You can have him in a minute. Saddled, or in harness, sir?"

"Saddled, and make haste," answered Captain Vernon briefly. There was a settled look upon his face that indicated some resolve and he did not seem in a humor to converse. Mr. Chivers noticed this and wisely refrained from exciting him by asking him useless questions. He merely stood off and admired the marvellous combination of strength and grace that his customer's person displayed, wondering what would come of it all.

When Black Dick was brought to him, Captain Vernon sprang lightly upon his back and, in the next moment, was galloping rapidly away. Not unobserved of the gossips, though; for, whilst the weather was too cold to allow them to loiter in the streets, they were ensconced in every available place behind shop-windows and gazing on what was passing without. And, as he rode by them, the surmises thickened about him and eager eyes were fixed upon him; and all who thus saw him wondered with the proprietor of the stables: What will come of it?

It was tolerably well known by this time that the only visits Captain Vernon made were made to the Hall. And, for that reason, Mr. Chivers's testimony had become the law with the gossips—at least so far as concerned Captain Vernon's intimacy with the family at Framleigh.

Captain Vernon, regardless, or oblivious, of the looks that were centred on him, hastening on left Alderley behind him and fell into the London-road—the road that led up to the park-gates and the statues and the white walls of Framleigh-Place.

The sound of Black Dick's hoofs striking the gravelled walk brought out the gate-keeper.

He was an old man and had grown gray in the service of the Arncliffe family. Standing at the gate, but without opening it, he looked at Captain Vernon through the iron bars and said, "You have had a ride for naught to-day, sir. The mistress has gone and the house is closed."

An irresolute look came upon Captain Vernon's face. If the man had said that the mistress was dead he could not have been more surprised. Gone? There was a solemn meaning in the word the old gate-keeper had uttered that he had never before associated with the word. Gone?

Pulling nervously at his riding-gloves he spoke to the man.

"Where has Mrs. Arncliffe gone; and when will she be back?"

"I dunno, sir. She went away some days ago, and left no word where she was a-going to. She was a-going to the country and wouldn't be back for a long time. That was the word as she left up at the Hall."

The gate-keeper touched his hat, and was about moving away; but he stopped as Captain Vernon spoke to him again.

"Did Mrs. Arncliffe mention how long she would be away?" he said almost purposelessly.

"She never said aught about it. She gave the keys to the housekeeper and ordered the carriage and went away. She took naught with her but her maid. That's all I know about it, sir." And then he went into the lodge.

Captain Vernon did not move for a little while after the gate-keeper had left him. Black Dick, impatient to depart, stamped his hoofs upon the crisp road and champed the bit in his mouth until the foam flecked his glossy neck. But Captain Vernon held him to the spot and looked abstractedly toward the house.

Gone! and no word left as to her movements! Gone from him, and no knowledge of her return dwelling in the minds of those whom she had left at Framleigh!

There was a strange dreariness about the autumnal scene upon which he looked. The November wind, rattling the dry branches of the park-trees, swept around him with a desolate sound; the pallid statues, with the deceptive smile upon the faces of some and others pointing warningly away, stared at him through the colonnade of trees rising up from their beds of dead and yellow leaves; the great house, itself, with its closed shutters, seemed to him but a sepulchre wherein his hopes lay buried.

The hand with which he held the rein lay idly upon the

pommel of the saddle, as his mind went back to his first meeting with Mrs. Arncliffe. In a dreary reverie he went over every circumstance associated with their acquaintance. He thought of the purpose that had brought him to Alderley; of the reception, and the passionate love that had sprung to birth in his heart for the woman against whom he had harbored evil; of the tears he had seen fall from her eyes on that night when he had stood shrouded in the shadows and had looked at her; of the sorrows of the old man who had no thought beyond his will; of the arrival of Monsieur Raphael, and of his quarrel with him, and of what would come of it; and of the announcement, finally, that the gate-keeper had just made to him—that Mrs. Arncliffe had gone without indicating her destination.

During his abstraction Black Dick had moved away from the gate and had taken the direction in which lay London. Walking, with the rein slackened in the hands of his rider, the horse, attracted by the smell of barnyards and stables, had turned into a road that led from the highway. Had Captain Vernon's mind not been otherwise engaged, he might have found time to look around him. Had he done so, he would have recognized the locality. The cottages of Mr. Arncliffe's tenantry, the trees on either side, would have made him aware that he was on the road that led to the Baron's Grave. But, as his abstraction continued, and as Black Dick felt no hand checking the rein flapping against his neck, the horse walked on and on until an impassable ravine opposed an obstacle to his progress. He stopped suddenly, and in stopping aroused Captain Vernon.

The Captain, at the moment of Black Dick's stopping, was thinking of the possibility of Mrs. Arncliffe's having gone to join Mr. Arncliffe and of her reasons for doing so. When he looked up, and around him, he started slightly.

Black Dick was standing motionless on the edge of that chasm into which, according to the superintendent's opinion, it would be death to fall. With a quick motion he jerked the rein and drew the horse backward. Then he surveyed the scene.

The workmen were absent, but the work had progressed finely since his visit a month before. The clumsy old wooden bridge which had been there previously had been pulled down and in its place rose, or rather hung, the graceful outlines of the suspension-bridge that Mr. Arncliffe had ordered to be constructed in its stead.

Dismounting and tying Black Dick to a pile of posts and timber near by, he approached the edge of the precipice and holding on to one of the iron pillars of the bridge for protection against falling looked down into the gloom below. As he gazed he shuddered at the possibility of a man's falling into it, for it was plain that any man who should do so could be preserved by a miracle only. Then he thought of the tradition that hung about the place—the tradition that he himself had heard a hundred times when a boy and which the superintendent had recalled to him on his previous visit—that a human life had already been lost there centuries before. Standing there he thought of these things for a long time, until his mind settled again upon what the gate-keeper had told him in regard to Mrs. Arncliffe.

He walked moodily away and, untying Black Dick, mounted him. And then, looking once more at the precipice at his feet, he turned the horse's head in the direction from which he had come and urged him to a rapid pace.

The cottages of Mr. Arncliffe's tenantry were left behind him, and the park and the statues and the walls of Framleigh came upon his sight.

As he passed the lodge he did not look back as he had

once before done, for there was nothing there to remind him of Mrs. Arncliffe now, but there was everything to speak to him of her absence. The shadow of that calamity rested heavily upon the scene, and he gave Black Dick the rein until he entered the streets of Alderley.

He had no definite idea in his mind as to what he should do. He had thoughts of shutting himself up in the house in Balfour-street until such time as Mrs. Arncliffe should return and the great hall-door of Framleigh should again open to admit him to her presence. He had mad thoughts of going out upon a pilgrimage to seek her—through the length and breadth of the land until he had found her; to throw himself at her feet and to declare his love to her; to tell her who he was and what he was—what wrong he had done her—what expiation he had made in the weary hours of forsaken loneliness sitting in the old house that was the miserable remains of the fortune he had squandered in all manner of lawlessness and error; to do this, and never to trouble her more with his presence.

But Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme? What of him and his threat, speaking in his wolfish smile and snaky eyes? What of the announcement that the newspaper contained—the announcement which Monsieur Raphael had thought important enough to cause him to pay another visit to my Horace, and which had been the key-note to his demand for a final understanding?

Black Dick, standing at the stables, and Captain Vernon sitting abstractedly upon his back, move to allow a gentleman, who is riding out of the stables, to pass. As he does so, the gentleman lifts his eyes to Captain Vernon's face. The old frown is there and the Captain twirls his drooping moustache with a nervous action.

But he is not observing the gentleman who is passing

him; and so when the former speaks to him, he turns sullenly to look at him.

Sir John Eden!

"Pardon me, Captain Vernon; you do not recognize your friend," Sir John says.

Captain Vernon smiles faintly in return, and answers, "It is I who must crave pardon, Sir John, for not seeing you before. May I ask what brings you to Alderley?"

The baronet has drawn his horse up by the side of Back Dick and is leaning with his hand upon the pommel of Captain Vernon's saddle, as he answers his question.

"A small matter of business brought me here this morning. I am one of the Alderley magistrates, you know, and I have come here on business connected with my office. By-the-by, when will you fulfil your promise to me and pay that visit to the Lodge?"

Captain Vernon is undecided as to his movements. Shall he accept Sir John's invitation to visit him—shall he fulfil his promise and go with him now?

He hesitates a moment, but in that moment he thinks possibly Mrs. Arncliffe may return in his absence; and so—

"Come with me now, Captain Vernon, to the Lodge," Sir John says, interrupting his meditations. "We will have a pleasant company there soon, I assure you. It is not far from here—only about five miles. You can come into Alderley whenever you like; and besides that, a friend of ours is visiting Lady Eden at present."

"A friend, Sir John? I scarcely understand you. What friend?"

"Mrs. Arncliffe."

Captain Vernon looks down into the smiling face that is turned toward him. Can Sir John have any suspicion of the truth? Does he notice any change in his companion's countenance as he says this?

No; apparently not; for the pleasant face wears the smile that is habitual to it. Captain Vernon extends his hand to the baronet.

"I thank you, sir," he says, "for this second invitation to Eden Lodge, and I shall do myself the pleasure of accepting it. You are right, Sir John; Mrs. Arncliffe's society cannot be otherwise than agreeable, and I shall add, to the present pleasure of her acquaintance, the future honor of an introduction to Lady Eden. When do you propose to start?"

"I await your convenience, Captain Vernon. What do you say to a ride to the Lodge now? You have a thoroughbred there, I perceive." Sir John strokes Black Dick's mane with a gentle hand. He admires a fine horse almost as much as he admires a fine woman.

The proprietor of the stables, standing on the pavement, says to Captain Vernon, "Black Dick is at your service, sir, for as long a time as you want him. I know he will get good grooming at Sir John's stables."

"Trust me for that, Chivers," answers the baronet.

Captain Vernon is thinking of what he shall say to Blacker. He is not long in reaching a decision upon this point; for he turns to the baronet, and speaks:

"Excuse me for a moment, Sir John, while I go to my room. It is just beyond here. I would invite you to the house, but really it is so old and dusty that I hesitate to do so. Old as it is, however, Sir John, I reverence it, for I was born there."

It is well that the proprietor of the stables has moved away when the Captain says this, for otherwise the gossips would have acquired a new string, as it were, to their conversational bow. Only Sir John is there to listen to him, however.

"Very well, Captain Vernon," returns the baronet. "I

will wait for you. I will send my man to-morrow to bring your luggage to the Lodge."

Captain Vernon waves his hand to his companion and rides down the street.

Sir John Eden, checking the impetuosity of the blooded horse under him, and waiting for his guest, sees him alight at the door of the old house and throw the reins to a passing boy. Then the Captain passes under the lion's head, and he sees him no more.

Captain Vernon's friend is not the only one awaiting his reappearance. There are expectant eyes watching the house in Balfour-street with a more anxious look than that which proceeds from the baronet. Eyes that are unnoticed of the unsuspecting Sir John. Eyes that stare from every available spot, and which centre upon the entrance to the old house. Eyes that twinkle and sparkle as the door opens and brings into view, once more, Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service.

The waiting, expectant eyes follow his movements as he mounts Black Dick and rides to rejoin his friend. As he approaches the baronet, he says, somewhat abruptly, "I am at your service now, Sir John. Come, let us start for Eden Lodge."

They ride away together with the red sunset falling upon them, leaving the owners of the staring eyes, with heads thrust out of door or window, still watching him as he canters away by the baronet's side and revolving in their minds, as usual, the old question of Captain Vernon's identity, and wondering, "What will come of it?"

And, reader, let us pause here for a moment to echo the gossips' thoughts. Will the meeting that fate has reserved for the woman who has fled from the man who is pursuing her and the man whom chance has led once more to that woman's presence, bring with it any elucidation of the Bal-


four-street mystery? Will the strange opportunity that brings these two together, once more, be fruitful of good or of evil?

Patience, patience! Captain Vernon is in the hands of his destiny. There let him remain until that destiny shall accomplish itself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. CREECH PURSUES HIS INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE BALFOUR-STREET MYSTERY.

MR. CREECH, left, after Captain Vernon's departure with Sir John Eden, to his own reflections and to the silent companionship of his Turks' heads and unexceptionable Havanas, became more and more restless, as the day passed, in a contemplation of the perplexing doubt that connected itself with the house over the way. Not more persistent in its condition of staring; not more constant in its gaze; not more immovable on its watch; was the Mandarin before the door, than was Mr. Creech behind it. Indeed, if it had been given to any one observing the tobacconist on that afternoon to witness the phenomenon of Mr. Creech assuming the Mandarin's position upon the block outside, and the phenomenon of the Mandarin settling himself comfortably, with his hands in his pockets, in Mr. Creech's place inside, the change would have been neither startling nor unexpected to his eyes. In respect, particularly, of a wooden expression of face and an unspeculative stare of eye, the difference between the two was so trivial as to warrant the belief entertained by Mary Agnes, as a part of her condition of being haunted, that the wooden figure, in its tawdry oriental finery, and Mr. Creech, in his plain English attire, are members of the same unfortunate family, whereof the one is doomed by enchantment to preside over the changed existence of the other until such time as the transformed figure shall resume its shape, and, with its shape, its ordinary habiliments.



Partly from a certain respect due her as a participator in and sharer of the mystery of Balfour-street, and partly by reason of another feeling which Mr. Creech could not or would not define to his own satisfaction, Mary Agnes had become no small element in the little tobacconist's daily life and her visits to his shop were regularly looked for. His frequent attempts to draw her into conversation rarely met with success, however. When pressed to remain by Mr. Creech "and be sociable," as he termed it, she would answer that *he*—referring to Captain Vernon—wouldn't perhaps like it, and so she must go; which she would proceed to do as quickly as possible, leaving the tobacconist to solitude.

But on this evening, when the sky was at its reddest with the setting sun, and when the chimneys and the roofs of the old house were defined against it with their sharpest limning, Mr. Creech, sitting behind his door, smoking his pipe and gazing, now at Captain Vernon's window, now at the lion's head above the entrance, now at the pale smoke ascending in a thin line straight from the chimney to lose itself in the hazy atmosphere, saw the front-door open and descried Mary Agnes crossing the street and coming toward him. It was a part of Mary Agnes's duties that under no circumstances should she permit the box which was the receptacle for Captain Vernon's cigars to be empty. On this special evening, observing that the box was empty, and fearful that Captain Vernon might soon return and discover her omission, she sought the tobacconist's.

She hurried past the Mandarin and entered the shop, Mr. Creech holding the door open for her. When the usual order for cigars had been filled, and as Mr. Creech stood behind his little counter slowly rolling them up into a brown-paper parcel and studiously observant of his customer, he perceived that she was thoughtfully looking out

at the red sky with an abstracted, dreaming look upon her face. The hue of the sunset, too, added a gentle pink to her complexion, and this, with the shining bands of her smoothly-arranged hair and the tidy collar around her neck (for Mary Agnes was very neat in regard to her personal appearance), moved the little tobacconist greatly. He looked out in the direction of her gaze and discovered that here and there clouds of a purplish hue had come up from the horizon and were taking odd shapes in the sky.

Walking to the door he stood by his customer's side and held the parcel irresolutely in his hand as if uncertain whether to give it to her, or to wait until she should ask for it. Then he drew up a chair for her and asked if she would sit down. Perhaps Mary Agnes, he thought, could enlighten him upon the cause of Captain Vernon's departure.

She thanked him and sat down with the same thoughtful look. Leaning with her arm upon the back of the chair, and with her cheek resting upon her hand, she commenced, very much to the tobacconist's surprise, to speak.

"When I came in here just now," she said, "what were you looking at, Mr. Creech?"

The tobacconist's guilty conscience smote him and he hesitated for a moment.

"I was waiting for you, Mary Agnes," he said, for lack of a better answer, when he had recovered his composure.

"Miss Tittermary, please," she returned, looking at him askance, and then turning her gaze upon the sky again.

"I hope I haven't offended. Miss Tittermary."

She shook her head rapidly as if to assure him that he had not given her offence. He stood leaning helplessly against the counter, doubtful of what to say. He had often imagined, when alone, what he would say to her and what questions he would ask, but now he seemed to have forgotten all.

"I thought that perhaps you were looking at those clouds in the sky," she went on after a while. "I thought that perhaps you could see there what I can see—what I often see, Mr. Creech."

He bent forward to look through the panes and to detect the purpose of her words, with a vague thought that perhaps a balloon had been sent up in London and she had discovered it sailing toward the town. But he only saw confused shapes of clouds, piled one on another, dark-blue in the centre and with golden edges.

"I don't see anything," he said, after this survey.

"*You* don't, but *I* do."

Mr. Creech, from a variety of reasons, felt so mortified at her words that he dropped the cigars upon the floor and knocked his head against the counter in his eagerness to recover them. When he had straightened himself, he remarked, in order to retrieve his lost ground, "I see clouds. What do you see now?"

"Mountains."

"Mountains?"

"Yes. And houses and cities, and ever so many strange and beautiful things!"

"In the sky?"

"Yes." Mr. Creech looked hard at the clouds and finally admitted that he saw mountains also.

"And I see a giant's head, just coming over the top of the hills." She clasped her hands together and continued her abstracted gaze.

"When I lived over there," she went on motioning with her head somewhere behind her—

"At the—the asylum, you mean?"

"Yes. When I was over there, whenever these images would come into the sky I would look at them and watch them till the darkness came and drove them away, and I

used to think how much prettier that land beyond them was than this." Mr. Creech, sitting beside her, listened to her without interrupting her.

"And because," she went on mysteriously, and looking around her, "because I saw all those pretty things there, they said I was—you know?" and she touched her forehead slightly and looked at him with an air of keeping him to the secret.

"I understand," said Mr. Creech, nodding his head. "They said you was a little flighty. But you wasn't, though?"

"Oh no!"

The tobacconist repeated the exclamation after her and stared at her in a silent contemplation.

"You know, Mr. Creech," she continued, "that one can't always do what one would like to do. You know one can't always have things as one would wish."

"No more can we, Miss Tittermary," assented the tobacconist.

"Well, then, when I was over there"—again with a backward motion of the head—"I used to cry, oh, so often, to think of the beautiful sky and to think that I was compelled to stay here when the birds were flying away to the west. To see them, as I have seen them, seeking the sunset, growing fainter and fainter against the brightness beyond them!"

Upon her face and in her eyes was a rapt expression which quite awed Mr. Creech. Whilst he acknowledged to himself that his customer's fancy was a pretty one, he could not conceal from himself that it was an odd one likewise. This feeling of surprise at Mary Agnes's words was not, however, confined to the tobacconist. Others had thought of it before, and among the attendants of the asylum whence Blacker had taken her it was a common

thing to hear that Mary Agnes Tittermary had queer fancies. It may have been that those so speaking could not understand her, and that the visions seen by her were beyond their comprehension. In her frequent hours of solitude when an inmate of that institution, she had peopled her existence with the strange, beautiful thoughts to which she had referred in speaking to Mr. Creech, and these had filled a void in her heart which existed there by reason of the absence of something for which she had often wished and which she had never known. Her mind was dwelling upon that void in her life when she next spoke. And when she spoke she exhibited the same abstractedness; the same confidence in the truth of what she said; the same simple, childish faith that had shown itself in her manner from the time when she had first looked out upon the tinted sky.

"You don't know how I came to live over there, Mr. Creech?" she said, with the backward movement of the head.

"No. How was it?"

"Oh, very strangely! Left at the door."

"A orphlun?" suggested the tobaccoist with a relish.

"Yes. An orphan foundling, Mr. Creech."

"Then," observed Mr. Creech, eyeing her with a new interest, "you never saw your father or your mother."

"No. They found me at the gate, lying in a basket, and with a paper pinned to my clothes upon which was written, 'Mary Agnes, an Orphan.' That is how I came to live over there." If she had told him that she had been found by the porpoises floating on the sea a thousand miles from land, and had been brought up by them by fin, the little tobaccoist could not have been more astonished. He expressed his surprise in a long, low whistle, and scratched his chin slowly with his little finger.

"Well!" he remarked finally, "that was a go! And you haven't ever been inquired for since? There hasn't ever been a lady come to the asylum, in a veil, and asked to see you, saying as how you was her long-lost child and crying over you? Nothink of that kind, now?"

"No. Nobody has ever called for me. But I have seen my mother often."

"Where?"

"At night, in my dreams. I have seen her face in the sunset too. In everything that is beautiful, I have seen her face." In the presence of this confession the little tobacconist was silent. He began to understand now why she spoke so lovingly of the images she could see in the drifting clouds coming slowly up from the horizon. Of all the wonderful phases of her haunted life, this, surely, was the most tender, the most merciful!

Mr. Creech had been so attentive to her words, and so much taken back, as it were, by her extraordinary vein of confidence, that he had quite forgotten, for the moment, the house over the way and its tenant. When he saw that Mary Agnes was silent after her last remark he ventured to avail himself of her unusual communicativeness.

"I wonder," he remarked, "where he was a-going to-day?"

"Who?"

"*He*." And the tobacconist looked darkly at the old house.

"I wonder!" said Mary Agnes.

"You don't know, then?" asked Mr. Creech in a tone of disappointment.

"Oh, no! But Mr. Blacker knows. He knows everything. *He* talks to *him*."

"He never says anything to *you*, now?" remarked the

tobacconist confidentially and in a way of luring Mary Agnes to the confession.

"Oh, dear me! no! But he talks to Mr. Blacker."

Mr. Creech pondered for a moment. He was, to all appearances, as far away from gaining any information as ever.

"How did you come to live over there?" he said, after a little while.

"How? Mr. Blacker took me away from the other place and brought me over there. I don't know how it was. They got tired of me at the other place, I suppose."

"Do you—" said Mr. Creech, at a loss for any other question on the spur of the moment and resolved to make the most of Mary Agnes while she remained in her communicative mood—"do you get plenty to eat over there?"

"Plenty."

"As much as you want?" he continued, still at a loss for any more important question.

"More than enough."

"Ah!" Mr. Creech looked down at the floor and then at the ceiling as if he had lost something and were searching for it. When he had completed the round of the room, he gazed at Mary Agnes with an air of having found what he was seeking. From the quickness with which he spoke to her, it would almost seem that it was his next series of questions that had been missing and had turned up again.

"I say!" he said suddenly. "Who is he? Where did he come from? What does he want here?"

She leaned toward him slightly, and Mr. Creech, following her mysterious motion, bent forward with his ear turned to her, the better to catch her answer.

"He's a Prince—that's what he is!" she whispered. "Did you ever read in that fairy tale about the handsome Prince who kissed the Beauty in her sleep and awoke her

to life again. He is the handsome Prince; but oh, who is the Beauty—who is the Beauty!" And then she covered her face with her hands, and, to the tobacconist watching her, there seemed to come a strange paleness beneath them on her cheek.

"Oh, such a handsome Prince! Oh, such eyes, and such a look from them! Oh, so tender sometimes, and then again so angry! But who is the Beauty he will kiss to life again and make happy with his love?" She was rocking herself back and forth, still with her hands before her face. Mr. Creech was staring at her, with a faint feeling upon him as of a man who has just awakened to a disagreeable knowledge.

"He *aint* bad looking," he remarked in a surly tone. "But I don't see the use of your talking about his eyes, Miss Tittermary. I should say, now, he don't think as much of yours. Oh, yes! that's right! Go on!" he said as Mary Agnes still repeated to herself, "Who is the Beauty—who is the Beauty!"

As Mr. Creech ceased speaking, she lifted her head and brushed back her hair with her hand. There was a faint color struggling upon her cheek that had not been there before she commenced to speak of Captain Vernon, the tobacconist thought.

"You like him?" said Mr. Creech sullenly.

"Do I? Oh, yes! He is so lonely and sad! Just like me. Why shouldn't I like him?"

"I don't know. It's your own lookout, you know!" the tobacconist remarked, still with his sullen mood upon him.

"But there will be some lady somewhere," she went on, "who will like him more than I do, Mr. Creech. There will be some sweet lady, like the Beauty whom the Prince kissed, to love him. And do you know why she will like him more than I ever can?"

"No. Why?"

"Because he will love her in return and they will be happy together. And I hope and pray that he may find her!"

With these words she rose from her chair, and, saying that night was coming on, declared that she must go. She received the cigars from the hands of the tobacconist, bade him good-bye and crossed the street, Mr. Creech watching her until she had gone under the lion's head and reflecting with much self-crimination that he had failed to extort any information from her, and dwelling in a surly humor upon her manner when speaking of Captain Vernon.

Mr. Creech was still standing at the door of his shop as the last flush in the western sky was dying out, and as he turned his eye toward it he thought of the images that Mary Agnes had seen. Even as he looked, he saw her, at the dormer window of the old house, with the glow falling upon her face and the abstracted look in her eyes and her hands clasped before her.

Oh, Mary Agnes! did the fading sunset hold no other vision for you, in your haunted life, than the face of the mother you had never known!

CHAPTER XIX.

EDEN LODGE, AND WHAT CAME OF CAPTAIN VERNON'S
VISIT.

SITTING in the parlor with no light breaking upon the twilight save the glow coming from the cheerful fire, the family at Eden Lodge were aroused from a silence into which they had fallen by the sound of horses' hoofs in the avenue. Lady Eden was sitting before the fire and was singing in a low voice to her little daughter resting upon a stool at her feet and leaning upon her mother's lap. Mrs. Arncliffe was seated at the window, and in her hand was a book which she had been reading when the dusk had come on. She was looking out upon the blank prospect, much as she had looked out from the window of her room at Framleigh when the Gorgeous Victim had aroused her and had told her that Captain Vernon was below and wished to see her. Her mind was dwelling, too, on that time, and on the wretched love which—though she struggled against it—still haunted her with a terrible pertinacity.

The child had risen to her feet, as her quick ear caught the sound of the horses' hoofs without, and had run to the window. Standing there and peering out, she exclaimed to her mother that her father had come back, and had brought a gentleman with him.

Lady Eden went out of the drawing-room to meet Sir John, saying to Mrs. Arncliffe as she passed her, "Come, Bertha, you must arouse yourself now. I cannot allow

you to mope in the corner any longer. There is a stranger with Sir John, whom we must entertain. So prepare yourself."

She spoke this in a pleasant voice, and then went out to welcome Sir John and his guest. But, in the gloom of the coming night, she could not see the face of the woman whom she addressed. She could not see the sudden whiteness that had come upon it when the child announced that the baronet had brought a visitor home with him.

Where had Sir John been all day? Mrs. Arncliffe thought. In Alderley. Whence had come the unexpected guest whom he had brought with him? From Alderley? Could it be Captain Vernon?

It was through Sir John that she had become acquainted with Captain Vernon. Had he met him in Alderley and insisted on his coming to Eden Lodge with him?

These thoughts passed hurriedly through her mind in the interval between Lady Eden's departure from the room and Sir John's throwing open the front door of the hall, and saying in a loud, cheerful voice, "Upon my word, Lady Eden, you will cause us to believe that you are but a poor housewife! Where are your lights to welcome home the lord of Eden Lodge?"

Mrs. Arncliffe listened intently. She had heard another footfall which sounded in companionship with that of Sir John's when he entered. There was enough light in the hall—coming from the parlor through the open door—to make everything visible there. Why, then, did not Sir John introduce his friend?

The baronet was speaking again.

"Lady Eden," he said, "I have brought a friend of mine—and of Mrs. Arncliffe's—with me to-night. Lady Eden, Captain Horace Vernon."

Mrs. Arncliffe rose suddenly, as Captain Vernon's name

fell upon her ear. She stood by the chair in which she had been sitting and held by the back of it for support. Had her life depended upon it, she could not have faced, calmly, the discovery that was to follow. What fatality had brought *him* here? Had he come to seek her at Eden Lodge; and if he had come with that purpose by what means had he discovered her place of refuge? As she stood by the chair, the statues that at that moment stared through the darkness in the park at Framleigh were not more pallid than she. As she stood there, leaning for support against the chair and wall, she gave no evidence of life or animation. Only the dull stare of expectation was in her eyes and the sense of her helplessness in her heart.

They were coming toward the parlor-door. Mrs. Arncliffe could hear them distinctly. Her mind was as strong to think and act as though no shock had been given to her by the arrival of Captain Vernon, but her body was incapable of motion and refused to obey its functions.

She saw with a helpless despair the glancing lights borne by the servant who was bringing them into the drawing-room. She heard their steps at the door and *his* voice speaking to Lady Eden. Now they were in the parlor, and behind them she could see the servant with the lights.

Captain Vernon looked around as he entered, and he saw the indistinct figure of Mrs. Arncliffe standing against the wall. He could not distinguish her features; but he could not be mistaken. It was she.

Sir John and Lady Eden had moved toward the fireplace and the latter was about sitting down.

In that moment Captain Vernon had advanced to Mrs. Arncliffe for the purpose of speaking to her; but, as he approached her with a smile upon his lip, he paused at the sight of her colorless face.

The lights were upon the table now, and she was staring at him with the fixedness of a woman in a dream.

As he came near enough to touch her, he took her hand and said to her gently, "You are unwell, Mrs. Arncliffe. Shall I call Lady Eden?"

"Yes, yes! Call Lady Eden, and leave me, Captain Vernon."

In a moment, at a word from Captain Vernon, Lady Eden and Sir John were at her side. Lady Eden's arm was around her waist, and she rested Mrs. Arncliffe's head upon her shoulder.

"Tell me what troubles you? You are not well, my dear Bertha," she said.

"Oh, take me away, Laura," she whispered. "I am foolish, I know; but I am not well enough to remain. A sudden sickness—a spasm—I will be better soon. But take me away!"

Her head rested wearily upon her friend's shoulder and her eyes closed until the pale lids covered them. Lady Eden supported her to a chair and sat her down in it. Then water was brought, and Captain Vernon, leaning over her, held the glass to her lips that she might drink.

Lady Eden and Sir John, standing a little to one side, consulted upon the propriety of sending for the doctor. Captain Vernon was still bending over Mrs. Arncliffe. His face was concealed from the gaze of his host and hostess and he was looking down upon her pale cheeks and closed eyes. As he gazed at her, he saw her lips moving in speech. The words that she uttered came as faintly to his ears as words spoken in a dream.

"The fault is not mine!" she murmured, "not mine!" He looked up for an instant. Sir John and Lady Eden were still standing before the fire and speaking in a low tone. Their backs were turned to him. Mrs. Arncliffe's

hand was lying upon the arm of the chair in which she was seated. He lifted it to his lips and then replaced it on its resting-place. As he did this consciousness seemed to return to her, and she looked up for a moment to see Captain Vernon bending over her and to note, in his dark eyes, the same earnest meaning they had borne on the day of their first meeting and when he had stood before her shutting out the light on that October afternoon.

That look recalled her to herself. She had not thought of Captain Vernon holding the glass to her lips whilst she drank. She had not thought of him holding her hand for an instant in his. Was it he, or was it Lady Eden? she thought.

In the doubt that came with that thought the paleness left her, and in the shame that that doubt engendered she hid her face in her hands and colored deeply.

"I thank you, Captain Vernon," she said, speaking with her hand before her face—"I thank you for the sympathy you have shown for my weakness; but I will not tax you longer now. I am much better. Leave me to myself."

Sir John and Lady Eden were still undecided. Still speaking together, earnestly, and gazing into the fire.

Captain Vernon noted this with a brief look and spoke to Mrs. Arncliffe. "I rode out to Framleigh this morning," he said, "and found that you had gone—whither, no one knew. When I returned to Alderley I met Sir John and he told me that you were here."

There was not much in these words, but there was everything in the tone in which they were spoken. There was everything, too, in the look that accompanied them.

"And you came to Eden Lodge because?"—she checked herself. She was about to say, "because I was here?"

The words had come from her almost unconsciously. She forgot, in that brief moment, that she was a wife, and

she only remembered that the man who was speaking to her was he whom she loved.

Captain Vernon was about to answer—about, possibly, to utter that which might never be recalled; but Lady Eden had turned and was looking toward them. Captain Vernon understood her look and answered it.

“Mrs. Arncliffe has quite recovered. She is much better now, Lady Eden.”

Then the baronet and Lady Eden came to her side, and Sir John congratulated her on her recovery from her temporary illness.

“It is well that you recovered so soon, Mrs. Arncliffe,” he said with his pleasant smile, “for, otherwise, we should have had the grimmest doctor in the country around to attend upon you. But Captain Vernon’s skill seems to have sufficed.”

Mrs. Arncliffe lifted her eyes to his face and smiled faintly. “I am indebted to Captain Vernon for the interest he has taken in my recovery, Sir John,” she said, “and I am glad that you did not send for the doctor. For, had he come, it would have been a useless trouble to him.”

Captain Vernon had moved away from her chair when Sir John and Lady Eden approached, and he was thinking of her words. Had she guessed his intention in coming to Eden Lodge? Did she believe that he had sought her?

Mrs. Arncliffe had risen from her chair and was speaking to Lady Eden. “Laura,” she said, “I must ask that you and Sir John permit me to retire. I do not feel well enough to indulge in conversation to-night. To-morrow I will be better able to meet you, my kind friends—and Captain Vernon.” She glanced slightly at the Captain as she spoke, and her eyes sought the floor as she noticed the look with which he observed her. For she read in his face something that she had never seen there before—something

of the feeling he had never uttered in words but which dwelt in his heart for her.

"I think, Bertha," said Lady Eden in answer to her remark, "that you had better retire. To-morrow you will feel well again. Come with me."

Sir John opened the door as the ladies moved toward it. Captain Vernon, standing by his side, bowed as they passed him, and, as Mrs. Arncliffe turned to the door to speak to her host, he gazed at her for an instant.

Mrs. Arncliffe observed this gaze and understood it. It was a sudden look that speaks from the eyes with a meaning more eloquent than words. It was a look that bears with it the knowledge that he, or she, upon whom it falls, is beloved.

Standing in the doorway, for a moment, she blushed, to the baronet's great surprise and bowed a good-night. Then, the closing door shut her from Captain Vernon's sight.

Sir John, walking to the fire, spoke to his guest of Mrs. Arncliffe.

"The most impressible creature that ever lived, I do believe, Captain Vernon! Did you notice how she blushed a moment ago as she stood at the door? And for nothing at all! I often tell Lady Eden that she is a subject for study; but I think her friend is a greater enigma." And then he laughed his cheerful laugh and sat down before the fire.

Sitting with his host before the fire in the drawing-room of Eden Lodge, and indulging in the platitudes of society talk, Captain Vernon saw the hours passing away. Answering Sir John's questions as pleasantly as they were asked him; narrating experiences of that wild life that was his in the jungles of India when he was "*of her Majesty's service*;" seeking to drown, in the zeal of conversation, the

recollection of what he was and the thought of the impassable barrier that lay between him and the woman whom he loved, before his mind rose, with a ceaseless persistency, the question that already exercised the good people of Alderley, when speaking about him: What will come of it? And what, too, would come of Monsieur Raphael and his threats?

The tinkle of the silver bell in the clock on the mantelpiece caused the baronet to look up. "Twelve o'clock, I declare!" he said.

"I did not think it was so late," remarked Captain Vernon.

"Nor I," answered Sir John, adding, "I must beg pardon for keeping you from that rest you must so much need; but your description of that tiger-hunt and those camp-scenes was so interesting that I quite forgot the time. Come, let us go, and I will show you your room."

And then the two men, thus thrown so strangely together once more, went out of the parlor, Sir John leading the way to the guest's chamber.

The servant in the hall followed them with lights, and Sir John, standing at the head of the stairs, indicated Captain Vernon's room to him, and, waving him "good-night," sought his own apartment. And then quiet came to the home at Eden Lodge. Quiet to Sir John and Lady Eden, slumbering peacefully. Quiet to the little form nestling beneath the warm covering in the crib with the waning fire falling upon its face. Quiet to the household, sleeping in man-servant's rooms and in maid-servant's rooms. But no quiet to those two, guests of the family, whom destiny had again brought together—no quiet to Captain Vernon pacing the floor of his room until the early cock had sounded his welcome to the day, and none to Mrs. Arncliffe weeping, with her face buried in the pillows, as the night wore on.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIRST STEP IN THE FULFILMENT OF CAPTAIN VERNON'S
DESTINY.

WHEN the family met at breakfast, in the morning, it was noticeable that Mrs. Arncliffe's cheek was paler than usual. Her eyes, too, were inflamed, and, on a question from Lady Eden, she said that she had slept feverishly on the previous night.

Captain Vernon spoke but little. The conversation was chiefly carried on by Sir John, who spoke upon the subjects that had been broached, in conversation with Captain Vernon, on the night before.

When the breakfast was over, the baronet proposed that he and the Captain should ride over the grounds.

It was a pleasant day. The sun shone out cheerily and the broad acres that were Sir John's stretched away to the right and to the left. Captain Vernon and the baronet rode until past noon. Then the latter proposed that they should return.

Riding back to the house, the gentlemen went into the library.

Sir John had some writing to attend to—something connected with his magistracy—would Captain Vernon excuse him for a little while? Certainly. Where were the ladies? The ladies were in the conservatory, the servant said—at least they were there a few moments ago. Then would Captain Vernon repair thither and join them? With pleas-

ure. Captain Vernon hoped that Sir John would not hasten his writing on his account. He would join the ladies in the conservatory.

And then he left the baronet in the library, writing, and went out to enter upon the first step of his destiny.

The little covered passage connecting the main building with the conservatory was passed and Captain Vernon had gained the entrance to the latter. His hand was on the glass door to open it, when, through the panes, he saw Mrs. Arncliffe advancing toward him. She was walking slowly and with her eyes fixed upon the ground; and, in her hand, she held a bunch of flowers she had gathered.

Captain Vernon, opening the door and closing it so as not to attract her attention, walked in the direction from which she was coming. She did not hear his footsteps, and she was aroused only when his voice fell upon her ear. He had looked around and had seen that Lady Eden was not present.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Arncliffe," he said. "I was not aware that you were alone. I had expected to find Lady Eden with you."

She lifted her eyes quickly. There was an irresolute look upon her face—a look that seemed to Captain Vernon to indicate an unwillingness to meet him. But in a moment this, and the slight blush that had accompanied it, passed away, and she answered, "Lady Eden was here a moment ago, but she has gone into the house. I am surprised that you did not meet her."

Plucking nervously at the flowers, she watched the leaves as they fell at her feet.

The irresolute expression was still upon her face, and when she looked up again it was to gaze toward the door of the passage leading toward the house.

Captain Vernon's mind reverted to the first expression

of irresolution that had come upon her when he appeared before her and he could see plainly that she did not wish to remain with him in the conservatory. Why was this? Had she detected, in his manner, anything that would lead her to suspect the truth?

Whatever might have been her feelings on the subject, it was a part of the task he had marked out for himself that she should remain. He had sought this interview with a purpose. When he left Sir John in the library writing, and came into the conservatory to seek Mrs. Arncliffe and her friend, he had done so trusting to the chance that might bring with it an interview, alone, with her.

The vision of the pale, suffering face above which he had bent in the parlor on the previous night, holding the glass to the parted lips, had haunted him through his long hours of walking. The memory of his wrong life—made wrong, as he thought, because of the absence of the love of one woman in whom he might have trusted, and who might have held him to good resolutions by the exercise of patience and forbearance—had risen before him in those hours and had brought with it a greater devotion for her who had come, when too late, to fix herself upon his heart. And, in those hours, the resolve that he had made was to seek her on the morrow and to reveal his passion to her. Not that he expected his love would be returned. Not that he thought those blue eyes, whereof the glances were dearer to him than all else, would lighten at the avowal that he would make. Not that he believed she ever thought of him or cared for him. But he wished to bow before her in expiation for the evil he had harbored against her, and, in crushing his pride in making the useless confession, to feel that he had atoned, in a measure, for the past arrogance and recklessness of his misspent life.

The ground at Mrs. Arncliffe's side was strewn with the

flowers that she had plucked to pieces. Just behind her was a rustic bench with a back formed of a gnarled and twisted vine. Looking around him, Captain Vernon noticed this bench, and, drawing it nearer to her, said to her, "Will you not rest yourself, Mrs. Arncliffe? You must be fatigued with standing."

Had she followed her impulse she would have begged him to excuse her and would have left him to rejoin Lady Eden in the house. But the earnest tone and the look that came from the dark eyes decided her. She threw the last flower from her and sat down. She had wished to avoid a conversation with Captain Vernon. She had wished never to be with him save when the family were present; and now she felt that her resolve was useless. Would that Lady Eden would return! she thought.

Leaning upon the back of the bench, as he had leaned above her chair when that strange sickness came over her, Captain Vernon, his mind filled with his purpose, dispensed with the usual flippant preludes and commenced the conversation that was to decide his destiny.

"When you left Framleigh, Mrs. Arncliffe, why did you leave no word as to your destination? When I went there yesterday morning I found that you had gone and could gain no knowledge of whither you had gone."

"I left Framleigh suddenly and did not deem it necessary to mention my destination. Lady Eden has frequently asked me to visit her and I came here to spend a few weeks with her. I am surprised, sir, that this should interest you."

"I ask this because I wish to say to you that you did your friends an injustice in leaving them in ignorance of your destination and of the time of your return."

"Injustice, Captain Vernon?"

Her back was turned to him, and her face was concealed

from him as she spoke ; and he could not, therefore, see the color deepening upon her cheeks. What was he about to say to her ? she thought.

"Yes, Mrs. Arncliffe. When I went there yesterday, I felt that you had been unjust," replied Captain Vernon.

She rose from her seat suddenly and said, "You must pardon me, sir, if I leave you now. Lady Eden expects me."

She had made a step toward the door, when she felt his hand placed lightly upon her shoulder. "Mrs. Arncliffe," he said, almost supplicatingly.

She hesitated for a moment, and then, with the same air of irresolution with which she had greeted his entrance, sat down again.

Without looking at him, she leaned her cheek upon her hand and waited for him to speak.

Still bending over her, he studied, for a little while, the other hand holding the back of the bench tightly ; the fair hair falling from the white forehead upon the whiter neck ; the arm that the falling sleeve left half revealed. In his heart ensued a conflict between his great love and his sense of the unhappiness that was hers, which, he feared, would be increased by an avowal of that love. But he had staked his last hope of happiness upon his purpose, and this purpose he obstinately—madly—pursued.

"Mrs. Arncliffe," he went on, gently, to say, "you will not think strangely of me when I tell you why I thought you cruel in leaving Framleigh as you did. The world may have been careless ; the false, hollow world, which has no sympathy with what is good ; and it may have gone its way, and given no thought to you. But I, Mrs. Arncliffe, went there with no careless feeling. I sought Framleigh, not to fulfil a duty that society imposes, but to forget for a moment what I was and what I had been. Are you listening, Mrs. Arncliffe ?"

"Yes, Captain Vernon, I am listening, but—I do not understand you. I cannot understand why you should seek Framleigh, above other places, to forget what you have been and what you are."

"I went there because, when with you, I heard words of sympathy that I had never heard before; because the past seemed less dark to me and the future less hopeless; because I had dreams in your presence of a happiness I had never known."

She again made a motion as though she were about to rise. For again across her mind swept the fear that Captain Vernon was about to utter that which he should not utter and to which she should not listen. His hand was upon her shoulder once more, and he was gently holding her in her place.

"Hear me a little longer, Mrs. Arncliffe," he said, "and then you may leave me."

"Go on, Captain Vernon, I will listen to you."

"When a man has gone through life unloving and unloved, and when, right or wrong, he has suffered and has been unhappy, if he should discover, even when too late, one who might have changed his nature had his destiny so willed it, can any blame attach to him if, in regretting the obstacles that hold him from that person, he should still follow her and linger near her?"

"No. If it be not wrong to do this, no blame can attach to him for doing it," she answered, obstinately refusing to understand the meaning of his words.

"So is it with me. My life has never been cheered by the smile of one who loved me; if I except my mother, who died before I had learned to appreciate her as I should have done; my hopes have been blasted, one by one, as the years have passed on. I will not say that I was blameless in this. I will not say what effect was produced upon

my nature by the opposition and hate of my fellows. I will not attempt to disguise the fact that I was hasty and prone to quarrel; but I only know that all opposed and persecuted me and that none sought to befriend me."

Her hand crept from her cheek to her eyes and hid them. She spoke in a low and trembling tone when she answered him.

"I believe that you have suffered, Captain Vernon. But I believe that your unhappiness has arisen from a false estimate you have placed upon the actions of those around you, which has induced you to distrust them. Oh, how much better it would have been for you had your good mother—for I know that she was good—lived to advise you and love you!"

"Yes, a hundred times better! for then I know that my nature would have been changed! Changed, so that what has come to me would never have come! Changed, so that I might have been happy in the love of the only woman whom I have ever loved, Mrs. Arncliffe!"

"That woman—the only woman whom you have ever loved—why do you not seek her? Why do you not tell her of that love, and forget, in a love returned, whatever has power to oppress you?"

She spoke these words rashly. She wished to impress Captain Vernon with the belief that she saw no meaning in his language and to deter him, by the exhibition of frankness, from declaring any love that he might have for her.

"If I were to go to her and tell her of this love, Mrs. Arncliffe, she would spurn me. Because in doing that I would be doing her injustice. She is beyond my reach, and I can only curse the guilty love I feel!"

"Then—forget her—Captain Vernon. For the sake of both, forget her!"

"Forget her? never! Leave her, it may be to hate me

for this avowal! Leave her, to go back to the old life that was mine before I knew her and loved her! Leave her, with the tears of shame upon her cheek for what I say to her now; but never forget her!"

She had risen, and as she stood before him the tears were indeed upon her cheek for the words he had spoken and the flush of shame reddened her face. He was still holding her hand. She had sought to withdraw it from his clasp, but he held it nevertheless, gently, but with a strength that she could not overcome.

"Release me, Captain Vernon!" she said. "You have spoken those words to me that you should not have spoken. Release me, sir, and let me go!"

"Forgive me for what I have said, Mrs. Arncliffe. Let me know that I carry away with me forgiveness for the wrong that I have done you."

He could not see the struggle that was going on in her heart at that moment. He could not know how great was the victory which, in that moment, she had achieved. There was no look upon her face to give him hope—there was no sound in her voice to indicate the struggle through which she was passing. But firmly, and with womanly modesty, she answered him.

"This is unmanly, sir!" she said. "I have given you no cause to address me as you have done! You have forgotten who I am, and you have put the first affront upon me that I have ever received!"

The hand he held in his fell suddenly to her side, and she turned from him and moved toward the door. Captain Vernon, speaking to her, checked her steps for a moment.

"Bertha! Let my wrong be my punishment! Let me not go away from you, never to see you more, without your forgiveness! I *must* know that you have forgiven me! I cannot live with your hatred crushing me lower than I am!"

"The forgiveness you ask I cannot grant now, Captain Vernon. When you shall have ceased pursuing me, and when you shall comprehend the respect that my position as Mr. Arncliffe's wife demands at your hands, I may forgive you. Until then, if we meet, we must meet as strangers."

The long struggle was over and the victory was gained. Leaving him with a deathly whiteness upon his face, and humiliated by the thought that, in avowing his guilty love to her, he had driven her from his presence, she walked rapidly to the door. She did not look behind her. In the triumph which she had achieved over her nature she trembled lest a word or a look might betray her true feelings to the man from whom she had parted. There was but one thought in her mind—to gain her room unperceived by the household and to weep at that bitter necessity that compelled her to reproach him for language which, had it been uttered to her under other circumstances and with no sense of wrong attached to it, she would have welcomed with tears of joy.

Captain Vernon, still with that pallor upon him which was almost that of death, looked at her retreating form until the darkness of the passage hid her from his sight. Then he sat down upon the bench that she had just left and held a long self-communion. With a dreadful fire consuming him he gave himself to thought.

What was left to him to do now? Should he remain at Eden Lodge, unsuspected of Sir John and Lady Eden, wearing a mask to them, but an object of aversion to the woman whom he loved and who hated him for what he had said to her? Should he go through the dreary ceremonials of society with Mrs. Arncliffe and bear about with him in her presence the unspoken scorn which, in her goodness, she had failed to speak? Or should he leave her, and

never again approach her—never again anger her with his presence?

Yes; better that than to meet her unforgiving and unloving eyes—eyes wet, perchance, with a new sorrow for the secret which from that day should be dead to both of them! Better his old home; his for a little longer; better the house in Balfour-street with all its solemn mysteries; with all the dangers that menaced him lurking about it; with all its monitors of death, its dust and its decay!

He rose from his seat abruptly and sought Sir John, still writing in the library. His host was alone, Lady Eden being in her room and Mrs. Arncliffe in hers. In a few words the baronet was made aware of his intention to return to Alderley. Something that he had forgotten until that moment, something connected with a friend whom he expected to meet there on his arrival, caused him to depart thus abruptly from Eden Lodge—would Sir John pardon him if he left in such seeming haste?

With his old smile the baronet said that he regretted Captain Vernon's determination. He regretted that the necessity should exist for his departure. Whilst he could put no obstacle in the way of his going, however, might he hope that Captain Vernon would return to Eden Lodge, so soon as the necessity that forced him to leave it had passed away?

Certainly; if it were possible for Captain Vernon to do so, he would return. Would not Captain Vernon wait for dinner? No, he must go now—the matter needed haste. His friend would probably arrive in Alderley by the night-train. He must be there to receive him. He hoped that Sir John would present his farewells to Lady Eden and to Mrs. Arncliffe and would be the bearer of his apologies for his hasty return to Alderley.

Black Dick stood at the door awaiting his rider. On his

way to the library, after his interview with Mrs. Arncliffe, Captain Vernon had ordered the groom to have him in readiness for him, and so he was not delayed in his departure. Bidding Sir John good-bye, he mounted the horse and rode rapidly down the avenue.

Motionless for a moment, at the lodge, whilst the park-gates were being unfastened, did he look back toward the house; and if he did, did he see aught to bring reproaches to himself for what he had done?

Possibly. For what he saw, as he looked back, was the form that he knew and loved so well, standing at the window of her chamber, and gazing at him through her tears.

The great gate clanged behind him, and he was again on the road to Alderley. But now there was no anticipation of coming happiness in his mind. Now there was no thought of the joy of once more meeting her whom he loved. But in its stead were self-reproaches and self-hatred for the words that he had spoken, and which might never more be recalled.

And so was it that Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, rode away from Eden Lodge to enter upon the second step of his destiny.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE WATCH.

IN common with the rest of Alderley, Mr. Creech has been in a state of doubt and uncertainty during the time of Captain Vernon's absence from the house in Balfour-street; and he passes that time in self-questionings as to what that absence will result in. The morning hours find him looking out listlessly, and studying, brick by brick, the masonry of the old house. He feels certain that the mystery who inhabits it has not yet returned from that visit to Eden Lodge, whereof all Alderley is ringing. He feels certain of this, because at no time has he been absent from his post of observation, during the hours of the day at the glass door of his shop, and during the hours of the night at the window of his sleeping apartment. He is also confident that the old man—the companion of him who dwells in the house over the way—has not been out on the streets since Captain Vernon's departure. If asked why he is confident of this, he will probably answer that he has been on the watch and he hasn't seen him go in or out under the lion's head in all that time. This, however, is a matter of speculation and surmise.

Certain it is, though, that up to twilight on the night of the second day of Captain Vernon's absence, no evidences of his return have met the eye of the little tobacconist, sitting at his nightly window, watching and waiting.

The street is well-nigh deserted. The larger portion of Alderley at this hour is gathered about snug fires, chatting

comfortably over the events of the day, and not a few of them wondering: What will come of it?

The smoke from hundreds of chimneys, joining the gathering shadows of night, hangs like a curtain above Alderley; and through this veil the lamps glimmer and twinkle in a weak and uncertain way.

Not so weak, though, but that Mr. Creech, leaning his head against the casement of the window and looking out vacantly into the smoke and shadow, can see something to reward his long hours of laborious vigil!

What is it?

Creeping up the street guiltily, and with cautious steps, he sees the figure of a man advancing toward the house in Balfour-street. Is there anything remarkable about this figure thus creeping up? Is there anything to cause Mr. Creech to reflect, in the long cloak, and in the slim, lithe figure of the man himself?

There is a lamp immediately opposite the tobacconist's shop. The figure has reached this lamp, and is standing under it and is looking up (curiously, it seems to the watcher,) at the windows of the old house. Mr. Creech rubs his eyes, and blows with his breath upon the window near which he is sitting, and wipes the moisture away with his sleeve and looks out eagerly. He will not be certain—he is not certain of anything in these later days—but he is willing to wager high that he has once before seen the man who stands under the gas-light.

Not that he can tell this by the stranger's features, for he cannot see his face, concealed as it is by the slouched hat and the shawl wrapped about his neck. But unless he is much mistaken, he has seen that cloak before.

Yes; he has it now! The cloaked mystery that stole away from the old house, when he was aroused from sleep by the closing of the door!

Mr. Creech is all eagerness and watchful anxiety now. He sees the mystery that the old house conceals gathering darker and darker around him and carrying him with it to the end! And he sees, with an affrighted curiosity, the cloaked figure come from under the light and cross the street and stand in the shadow of the Mandarin before his own door. What next? Staring down on him from his dark room, the tobacconist sees him light a match against the Mandarin's leg and hold it to his lips. He is about to smoke. Not a cigar, nor a pipe, but a cigarette. A foreigner, now, he'll be sworn! Whatever doubt he may have had before, as to whether the man whom he saw on that eventful night, sitting and talking with Captain Vernon in the old house, were really a foreigner, is dispelled now. The cigarette has decided the matter.

The figure on the pavement below, standing in the shadow of the Mandarin, smokes and stares for a half-hour at the house over the way. The tobacconist, alert and watchful, from his post at the window stares for a half-hour at him.

In this lapse of time the darkness has gathered more deeply and the smoke has joined it more visibly, and, together, they cover Alderley with a dense curtain. No man is abroad now. No man in Balfour-street save the cloaked mystery, staring at the house over the way and patiently waiting.

Waiting for what?

What sound is that which strikes the ear of the little tobacconist and that of the figure leaning against the Mandarin? What sound is it that has the power to cause them both to lean simultaneously forward—the man below out of the shadow and the man above with his face thrust to the extreme limit of the window—and to gaze in the direction from which it proceeds?

It is the echo of footfalls, ringing out angrily on the quiet night and coming toward the house in Balfour-street from the direction of the stables.

The few moments that pass seem like hours to the tobacconist. How do they seem to the man below?

Looking in the direction from which comes the sound of an invisible heel upon the pavement, the tobacconist sees, emerging out of the smoke and the darkness and walking into the circle of light that falls from the lamp, a form that does not require a second look to establish its identity. A man, vast and towering and with angry, gesticulating hands. The form of Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service.

In the quick glance that he gives below, after satisfying himself of this, Mr. Creech sees the man upon the pavement draw farther back into the shadow and throw his cigarette upon the pavement and stamp it out. He does not wish to be seen by the man who has just appeared upon the scene, the little tobacconist thinks.

No time for surmises now!

Captain Vernon has walked out of the circle of light and is standing before the door of the old house. His hand is on the knocker; but he hesitates to raise it.

All this the little tobacconist can see in the uncertain light that comes from the lamp; and of all this, too, the man below is witness.

Staring down with trembling eagerness, Mr. Creech waits for what is to follow. Will Captain Vernon arouse the old man in the house, and will he pass under the lion's head? No! He has dropped the knocker and has turned away from the door. He stands for a moment, a shadow against the darker shadow of the opposite wall, and then walks away in the direction from which he has come. The man below, peering out of his place of concealment, follows

him with his eye. The tobacconist above observes them both.

Captain Vernon has passed again under the lamp, and his form is again becoming indistinct in the night. The sound of his footfall becomes fainter, but he is not so far off but that the tobacconist can see his hand raised heavenward and threatening the stars.

But what of the man below?

He, too, is moving. He has crossed the street and is following Captain Vernon. But no sound of footfalls comes to the tobacconist's ear as he walks. If Mr. Creech were asked to describe his manner of walking at this moment he feels certain that he would describe him as walking on his toes. He does not walk boldly, either. Rather does he court the obscurity of the houses and the shadow of the walls. Creeping cautiously, not too fast to overtake the man ahead of him, and not so slow as to lose sight of him, the tobacconist sees him, too, pass under the lamp and into the gloom beyond.

Then, as though a voice were calling upon him to follow, Mr. Creech moves away from the window and gropes down the stairs and goes into the street. He forgets his great-coat, and the cold air chills him. But his thoughts are elsewhere in that moment. They are with Captain Vernon passing, a square away, under the lamp at the corner; with the cloaked figure cautiously following him.

He turns the key in the door, buttons his coat about him, and then moves silently behind the man who had been watching and waiting in the shadow of the Mandarin.

Now what shall the little tobacconist see?

If he have not a stout heart in his bosom, and if he be not a bold enough man to look death calmly in the face, let him go back!

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THE BELLS WERE SET A-RINGING.

WHEN Captain Vernon stood with his hand upon the knocker of the front door of the house in Balfour-street—after having left Black Dick at the stables—his mind was still agitated at the thought of what had occurred between Mrs. Arncliffe and himself on that morning. This mental agitation expressed itself in the gesticulations which Mr. Creech at his window, and the cloaked figure upon the pavement, had witnessed.

In the brief moment that Captain Vernon had stood before the door, he had resolved that he would not call down Mary Agnes to open it and let him in. In his angry mood the quiet that reigned in the old house was hateful to him. He felt that he could not sit quietly in his room and listen to the monotonous sound of the town-clock as it rang out the hours of the night. In his passionate humor he must have action. Inaction would be torture to him—he must walk until the feelings that swayed him had passed away. And this was why he had dropped the knocker and had walked hastily from the old house, as witnessed by the two men who were watching his movements.

When he went down the street—followed stealthily by the man in the cloak, who was followed in turn by the tobacconist—he had no definite purpose in his mind as to his course. The quiet night—so strangely at variance with the tumult in his own mind—lured him to walk his passion into forgetfulness. Under the impulse of movement he

might find that calm which could not come to him in the desolate quiet of his room.

He met no one in the streets as he went on. If he saw an occasional policeman, it was to find him coiled up in a doorway and cowering for protection against the cold. If an occasional light fell across his path—other than that from the street-lamps—it came drearily from the recess of some shop in which the shopman sat drowsily at his desk balancing his day's accounts.

Passing the stables on his way he found them closed. Passing the Knight and Dragon he heard from the little back parlor proceed a boisterous merriment. Clenching his fist angrily he hastened away and left the inn behind him. The sound of the human voice was hateful to him—doubly hateful to him, now that his last hope of happiness was lost.

The darkness closed around him, but not so closely but that his form was visible to those who followed him. Whilst his footfall sounded heavily upon the pavement, the echo of theirs was inaudible. The man in the cloak did not look behind him. Had he done so, however, he could scarcely have seen the little tobacconist skirting the houses as cautiously as he did himself.

Captain Vernon, wrapped in his sombre meditations, threaded the streets with an impetuous haste. He was staring through the gloom before him and he gave no thought of what was behind him. His mind was dwelling on what had come of his wayward, reckless life which, wanting the love of the woman whom he had that day affronted, he felt, now, was doomed indeed. Did the earth, on all its broad surface, hold to-night that which could save him now? Was there aught for which he could live? No! He was outlawed from *her* as he had been outlawed for years from his fellow-man. Outlawed from her by his own

word and answerable to himself alone for what had come to him.

The horizon upon which his eye was fixed broke suddenly upon him with a pale irruption of light. He looked around him. In the passion of his thoughts he had left the streets of the town unaware and was now in the road that led to the great city. The trees on the roadside waved their dead branches toward him with a warning movement as the wind swept through them. Afar off, upon the highway, other trees, intervening between himself and the glare that arose from London, drew ghastly outlines of knotted trunks and leafless branches against the lurid sky. But did that solemn dawn reveal no more to him than the trees upon the roadside?

As if in a strange vision he saw—a mile away—the house that was consecrated to *her* presence—the house whereof the dull stone and mortar had claims upon his reverence. Fixed against the pallid sky, with every outline faintly drawn, the great house rose between him and the distant light.

The crisp road crackled under his feet as he moved on with no thought of halting. But behind him came no token of pursuit as the two men crept guiltily after him in the shadow of the hedge.

He was passing the park of Framleigh now. In a little while he would be past the gate-keeper's lodge, and going—where?

The gates were reached, and just beyond was the lodge. Through the window a cheerful stream of light came out into the night and fell upon the hedge opposite. The gate-keeper was sitting up, apparently.

Captain Vernon turned from the middle of the road and approached the window and looked in. Sure enough, the gate-keeper was there with an old gossip and was chatting

before the fire with a pipe in his mouth and a pot of ale on the table between him and his friend.

There was a quiet comfort about the scene that held Captain Vernon for a moment at the window to look upon them. The gate-keeper was puffing away and was making rings upon the table with his tankard; and the gossip was puffing, too, and looking thoughtfully into the fire.

Captain Vernon made a step backward. He was about moving off; but he heard the gate-keeper say that which checked him. He heard the man speak the name of him who was lord of Framleigh and of all that it contained. He stopped to listen. Placing his face near the window, he stood motionless. The two men in the lodge had evidently been conversing when he first came up and were about to renew the conversation. What—thought Captain Vernon—what about Mr. Arncliffe?

The gate-keeper was speaking. "Mr. Arncliffe," he said (and this is what Captain Vernon had overheard),—"Mr. Arncliffe always was a pecooliar man. What I'd call a eccentric man."

"A little queerish?" questioned his gossip, holding his tankard to his lips, and looking over its rim from the corner of his eye.

"No, Stephen; not a little queerish. There never was a Arncliffe as was queerish. It aint in 'em, Stephen. Peecooliar is the word as I used."

"Ah! That's what you said. Peecooliar."

"When I say 'peecooliar,' I mean for to say that Mr. Arncliffe aint like other men. If he was like other men, he wouldn't be a Arncliffe, Stephen. There never was a Arncliffe as took after other men. And that's why I say Mr. Arncliffe is peecooliar."

"True for you," responded the gossip, putting down his tankard and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

“What makes Mr. Arncliffe so pecooliar,” continued the gate-keeper, “is because you never know when to take him. He’s a proud man, is Mr. Arncliffe, and don’t say nothink to anybody, *he* don’t. He comes and goes from Framleigh when you don’t expect him, *he* does. When he come down this evening from Lunnun, nobody was expecting of him. I heard somebody a-tapping at my window there, and when I went out to look, who should it be but the master himself, sitting there on his horse and saying in his quiet way, ‘Open the gate, Martin, and let me in.’”

“Bless us! That *was* pecooliar!”

Captain Vernon, standing at the window, heard every word of this as plainly as if he had been sitting before the fire himself and talking to the two men. He knew this much, then—that Mr. Arncliffe had returned to Framleigh. But what had brought him from London?

But, hush! the gate-keeper was speaking again.

“Yes, Stephen, there was Mr. Arncliffe as quiet as you please. It was just like him to come when nobody was expecting of him. All he had to say to me was to ask me if they was all well up at the Hall, and then he rode to the house.”

“Where did he go, Martin, when he went away a half-hour ago?” queried the gossip.

“I dunno, unless he went down to look at that new bridge over the Baron’s Grave. He asked me if I had seen the bridge lately and how it looked.”

“A cold night and a dark night to be going to the Baron’s Grave—don’t you think so, Martin?”

“Colder and darker than I’d ventur’ out in!”

Cold and dark! but not cold enough or dark enough to deter Captain Vernon, breaking away from the window hurriedly, from leaving the two men talking before the fire, and from walking away hastily in the direction of that same

Baron's Grave! Cold and dark! but not cold enough or dark enough to deter the two men, who had been watching whilst he waited, from following swiftly after him!

The great trees on either side of him, like those other trees farther on, waved their useless warnings to him. The candles from the cottages of the tenantry looked out on him hastening through the night with no power to urge him back to the house in Balfour-street. There was no spot to him that held, around its fireside, the household gods of home. There was no door to open to him and to shut out, with its closing, the countless ministers of evil that surrounded his life with blasted hopes and unavailing regrets.

No! Let his destiny—working through all impediments to one unchangeable end—carry him with it! But let him make one further effort to redeem himself until, happily, whatever of destruction lay in the fulfilment of that destiny might be annulled in the last and greatest sacrifice he would make in crushing his stubborn pride!

To see Mr. Arncliffe; to speak to him; to tell him who he was; to make him aware of that dark mystery of his life that had brought him into association with Monsieur Raphael; to do this and to plead to him to aid him with his influence, was the single hope that remained to him, the single barrier between him and that dark future which he pictured to himself.

He had neared the common which was traversed by the Baron's Grave. Slowly after him and with a noiseless eagerness crept the two men. Following a footpath, he reached a hedge crossed by a stile. He paused here to rest himself and sat upon the lowest step. Stopping when he stopped, the two men behind him, each in his turn, crouched and waited.

Captain Vernon, sitting there, ran his hand through his long curling hair and gave himself up to thought. His

mind was dwelling upon what had occurred that day at Eden Lodge and upon the barrier that he had raised between himself and Mrs. Arncliffe. From thinking of these things he commenced to speak to himself about them.

"How good she is!" he said tenderly. "How good she was not to have spoken to me as my guilt deserved! Hundreds in the same position would have denounced me. Not that I would have cared for that, because no peril that I could not have faced would have sprung from it. But then *she* was too merciful, too charitable, to revenge herself for the wrong that I had done."

Looking away from him in the darkness, he paused for a little while, and then went on speaking. His tone was that of self-exculpation in which he sometimes spoke. He was seeking to convince himself that what he had done would admit of palliation.

"In confessing my love to her, I had no thought of wronging her. I did not think of her as Mr. Arncliffe's wife. I did not reflect upon the barrier that was between us and which she could never cross but to her dishonor. But as I looked upon her I saw the woman whom I loved—the woman whose simplest word of kindness would have rescued me from myself."

Still looking fixedly in front of him, still framing new apologies for his conduct, he continued in what he deemed his self-justification.

"I do not know that a guilty love consists more in expressing it than in giving way to it. I do not know that to love in secret that which we should not love at all is a less wrong than to avow the love we feel. In loving her I was but making that confession of my subjection to her which I felt would be an expiation."

He was silent again for a space, his head leaning upon his hand. There was a lingering tenderness in his voice

when he next spoke, which testified to the remorse with which he contemplated the story of his life.

“Had my destiny been a different one; had I foreseen what was to be in those old days when I knew her as a girl; had I never wandered away from her side or wrought evil against her; I might to-day have been happy in her love. But the wrong is mine, and mine must be the penalty. The sin that I once contemplated and the sin that I caused to be committed have come back to me, and I feel that henceforth I am doomed—doomed!”

He lifted his head to stare again through the night. In that look his eye fell upon the gaunt trees on the roadside. The low moaning wind, coming across the common, caused them to tremble as he looked at them, and beneath its influence the branches of those nearest him took weird shapes of spectral hands and fingers, still warning him back to Alderley. Even as he fixed his eye upon them, their movements changed with the changing wind. Now they were twining arms locked in a loving embrace; now they were at deadly odds stabbing at each other with phantom knives. Now they were bending forward and whispering to each other; now they were erect and pointing, like their fellows, Away!

With that fixed stare he contemplated these inanimate and inarticulate monitors, and in that contemplation the current of his meditation seemed to change. When he next spoke, his words bore testimony to another train of thought, growing out of his remorse.

“For her dear sake, if my appeal to-night be successful, I will leave this land forever. For her dear sake I will go away, so that my presence will never more bring the blush of shame to her cheek or the tears of sorrow to her eyes. When I am gone perhaps she will forgive me. When she feels safe from my persecution, perhaps her lips will speak

those words which shall declare my forgiveness. When I am gone she will weep no more."

Tears? Were there tears in that man's eyes, sitting there with the iron in his nature crumbling to the veriest dust? Or, did the voice seem broken and tremulous to the cloaked figure, creeping close to him behind the shadow of the hedge the better to listen to him?

"For the sake of charity, Mr. Arncliffe cannot refuse my appeal. When he shall know how little guilty I have been; how that dark destiny of mine has ever been between me and fortune; how, even when I most sought the right, I was driven to the bad; he will rescue me with his influence from the degradation in which I am. Upon that chance depends my future. If it fail me, I shall have risked all and lost all!"

Kicking the clods at his feet away from him in the darkness, he went on, still changing in the current of his thoughts.

"I wonder where Raphael is to-night. Bad as is his nature, I owe him a debt. I know that he has betrayed me. I know that for the sake of gold he has done his worst. Feeling as I do now, and believing him guilty, I could forgive him, even, for the sake of being at peace with all the world. Even him, so that in summing up the better resolves that she has instilled into my heart I may know that in my changed condition I am worthy of the unending love I bear her!"

Was it the wind that stirred the hedge behind him and which caused him to turn quickly and to look in the direction whence the sound had come? If it were, it had passed away as suddenly as it had come; for all was silence there as he rose to go upon his lonely walk.

For a moment he stood by the stile, passing his hand across his brow. For a moment, turning to look back at

the shadowy fabric of Framleigh and at the warning trees and the pallid sky. For a moment, pausing to give one passionate thought to his wrecked hopes, and to the dear face that he had left that day drowned in tears; and then he was gone.

What time, following upon his track, went on the cloaked figure. Creeping so silently that it seemed but a moving shadow cast by some spectre visible only in its shade; so bent in its cautious progress, that shape it had none, and no attribute but that of motion; the pursuer followed the pursued. To be followed in its turn by a trembling uncertain form of a man, irresolutely keeping to a purpose inexorably controlling him, and fading away, out of the whiteness of the road, into the darkness of the common beyond.

In the half-hour that elapses after the departure of these shadows, pursuing and pursued, the silence is broken at intervals by sounds which seem to come from all quarters and of varied meanings. Sounds of farm-boys, driving cattle into enclosures and whistling at their work. Sounds of cows lowing and calves bleating, and dogs barking, and of barnyard fowls disturbed in their roosts and clattering as they settle themselves again. Sounds of a voice, as the farmer stands in the doorway of the cottage calling to the boy at the stable to lock the door and make all things fast. Sounds of an infant crying and of a woman's voice singing an old ballad of the sea and coming out into the night through the open door. Sounds, as the half-hour draws to its close, of a town-clock striking out of time, and making haste to tell the hour as if in apology for its mistake. Sounds, as the full hour of eight comes, of jangling bells ringing out from Alderley with a confused mixture of notes, bass and shrill. Sounds, mingling with the rest and surviving them all, of the murmur of the distant city; and

then, save this last droning hum and the wail of the sighing wind, all is still.

The silence—so little broken by this far-off hum and this sighing wind which seem but another phase of it—falls drearily upon the black common. The sense of movement, kept in existence by the motive branches of the trees, still produces those fantastic shapes against the cloudy red background of the sky; and with their skeleton fingers pointing in the direction in which the three men have gone, the old trees seem to wait.

Waiting for what? Patience!

The sense of movement, still at work among the branches, brings other illusions and other manifestations of being alert on the part of the trees upon the roadside and of the trees farther off. These illusions and these manifestations of being alert present them as in the act of leaning toward each other, still with the phantom fingers pointing to the Baron's Grave, still with the long, lean arms stretched out toward the space beyond; and to that ghostly pretence of waiting they seem to add that other ghostly pretence of listening.

Listening for what? Hush!

Was it a voice calling somewhere in the darkness? Was it a sound, born no one could tell where and dying prematurely even in its birth, which broke upon the ear and then was heard no more? Was it an echo of the wind, louder for a moment than usual, which passed away even in making itself audible? Was it a mysterious manifestation of some unreal element of the night, taking shape to mortal ears and instinct with a terrible meaning?

Há! Again!

Breaking upon the silence with a shrill, clear vehemence that proclaimed it no distempered fancy of the brain; no inanimate echo of wailing winds; no miraculous creation

of the ghastly hour; it rang across the common with a hideous warning to human ears and an urgent appeal to human charity! Rising from earth to heaven with a clamorous testimony, it spoke, in the most solemn word that the language holds, of the blackest crime that has followed the race since Eden, and proclaimed a wild alarm that checked the laugh around the distant firesides and caused the listening mothers among Mr. Arncliffe's tenantry to clasp their children, trembling, to their bosoms—

“Murder!”

Then, as if it needed but this ominous note to set the night astir with moving figures and wondering cries; as if from ambush had sprung the enchanted spirits of the gloom; the scene becomes motive with the forms of men running hither and thither, and noisy with voices and the sound of opening and closing doors. The hue-and-cry is raised. The inmates of the cottages are abroad with lanterns, beating vaguely about the fields and the road, until, one loud voice crying out, “Where?” and another replying, “Down at the Baron's Grave!” the twinkling lights, scattered far and wide, tend in one direction—the direction in which the three shadowy figures had gone a half-hour before.

Now the lanterns are gathered together in a bunch and the men bearing them seem to be holding them near the ground and examining something closely. Now they are separated again, some going to the right and some to the left, and others gleaming for a moment and then disappearing as though the earth had swallowed them. Finally they have all vanished but one, and that one is coming hastily up the road in the direction of Alderley.

In this interval of silence—a silence broken only by the murmur of voices from the cottages; and in this disappearance of the moving lights, save one, does there come noth-

ing else to give note of life and motion? Is that a beast of the field dashing out of the darkness of the common and spurning the dust of the road, for a moment, in its hasty flight—spurning the dust and making away with headlong speed in the same direction as the solitary lantern? Is that another beast of the field, darting in its turn with a terrified haste into the road, as the other has done; his face whiter than the dust that rises beneath his feet; and which, as the first figure calls to it to stop, rushes away with a scared cry and is lost in the night? No! These shadowy forms so hastening away from the doom that is behind them, hurrying with almost noiseless steps toward the far twinkling lights of the town, bear the shapes of men! One, the figure of Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service; the other, that of Mr. Creech, the tobacconist.

Nothing of Mr. Arncliffe? Nothing of the cloaked figure that had been following Captain Vernon? Patience! Patience!

Captain Vernon and the tobacconist, impelled by the same purpose but with diverging steps, hasten rapidly along the road. Behind them, or between them—for in this race for life it is speed and not position that counts—the man with the lantern hurries to the same goal. Upon Captain Vernon's face a more deadly paleness has made itself apparent. It is the whiteness that comes with the knowledge of his accomplished destiny. Upon the face of the tobacconist; the tobacconist trembling as he runs; there is a pallor, too—the ashen hue that overspreads the countenance of a wretch stricken with a palsying terror. So, as an hour before, coming from the town, had come three men, now go on three men seeking Alderley. So, as an hour before, had been heard the sounds of voices talking, and cows lowing, and dogs barking, now rise the same sounds vexing the night with their outcry.

Captain Vernon, looking around him and behind him in his flight, sees that from every quarter new lights are making their way to the Baron's Grave. There is no time to follow the direct line of the road now. He sees that the dreadful summons has startled more homes than one, and that he must make haste if he would reach the house in Balfour-street without detection.

Outstripping all in the race—all but one, and that is the tobacconist—he fixes his eye upon the lights of Alderley, and, avoiding the paths followed by the bearer of the approaching lantern, he makes his way across the fields and over hedges until he has left him behind him. Even as he flees, he can see, in his backward look, that the lights which had a little while before disappeared have come again to the surface near the Baron's Grave, as if the earth had surrendered them once more to the upper air. He can see that they are huddled together and that they move slowly and with an uncertain rise and fall. Possibly the men who carry them have brought something with them up to the surface—something that to Captain Vernon's mind's eye looks shapeless and mangled, as the light from the lanterns falls upon it.

Still on and on. No time to pause now. In a half-hour the town and Framleigh would be aroused. In a half-hour every street would be thronged with strong men asking: "Who did it, and how was it discovered?" In a half-hour the town-bell would be set a-ringing and the whole of Alderley would be told of it. In that half-hour the house in Balfour-street might be gained, and time might be secured. Time to consider, and time to perform the last expiation that was his to make.

The fields were passed, and he stood once more in the outskirts of the town. The route by which he had come

was shorter, by half, than that pursued by the man who was approaching Alderley by the highway.

He looked up the road and he could see the glimmer of the lantern, now falling, now rising, with the motions of the man who bore it. The man was evidently running.

Hastening through the quiet streets he fell, by a round-about course, into Balfour-street. Pausing for a moment at the corner he looked up and down. There was nothing in either direction that the light from the lamps revealed. But he could have sworn that there came to his ear the sound of rapidly receding footsteps upon the pavement. It might be two squares away; it might be three. Footsteps that were going, too, in the direction of the old house.

Again, standing there, he questioned himself. What mysterious companion was that who shared his guilty flight? Were these footsteps connected with that phantom that had swept past him in the open fields and which had fled away from him with a wild cry at the sound of his voice?

Throwing another quick glance around him, he hastened on. Not noisily, not cautiously; but rapidly and with steps that gave no echo upon the walks.

There was a dead silence upon the town as he reached the house in Balfour-street. He lifted the knocker on the door and struck one blow with it.

Waiting for Blacker or Mary Agnes to come down and admit him, the minutes passed drearily. Would they never come! Were they both asleep!

His hand was again upon the knocker, but he withdrew it at the sound of footsteps upon the creaking stairs. When the door opened, exposing Mary Agnes hiding timidly behind it with a candle in her hand, he entered and shut it quickly. In the opening of the door the light from the candle flared out into the street.

"Curse that candle!" he said angrily. "Why did you bring that candle with you?"

She made no answer in words; but with a white face, and trembling in every limb, stared at him as he stood frowning upon her. Then she laid the candle on the floor and covered her face with her hands, moaning, "Oh, oh! Blood, blood!"

He took her by the arm hastily. "Come!" he said as angrily as before. "What ails you?"

Shaking her head, she still went on with her monotonous moan, "Oh, oh! Blood, blood!"

He kicked the candle away from him violently and extinguished it. Then, in the darkness that had followed, he took her by the arm again, and said hoarsely, "My horse fell with me to-night! Go to your room, and be silent!"

She left him to go up the stairs, murmuring, "Don't speak so harshly to me, please!"

He called after her. "Is my room ready?"

"Yes, Captain Vernon."

"Is Mr. Blacker asleep?"

"I am sure I don't know, sir. I hardly know anything to-night." Then she repeated her wailing exclamation, "Blood upon his face! At last, at last!" And so she left him to himself, standing in the silent hall, and went her way to her room, still murmuring, "At last, at last!"

Before the echo of her footsteps had ceased, he walked to the foot of the stairs and listened. When he heard her door open and close, he ascended the stairs. Passing the door of Blacker's room he stood beside it for a little while and called to him gently. But no answer came to his call, and then he sought his own room.

When he had lighted the candle and locked the door he went to the looking-glass and examined his face. Strong as were his nerves, what he saw there startled him.

It was not that its deadly paleness excited his surprise; that pallor had been there from the time he had ridden away from Eden Lodge on that afternoon, and his feelings since that time had made him aware that that whiteness existed there. But the spectacle that presented itself as he looked was that ghastly presence of blood that had terrified Mary Agnes in the hall. Blood upon his face in spots. Blood upon his face in smirches as large as a man's hand. Blood, or the dried evidence of it, trickling down his neck and dyeing his shirt of its ominous hue. He pushed back his hair, and, as he did so, he looked at his hand. Blood there, too, and on the cuff and sleeve of his coat it had stained the cloth with a dark stain, and had stiffened it to the touch.

"No wonder the girl was frightened!" he muttered. "No wonder!"

When he had said that he poured water into a basin, and proceeded to wash himself and remove the guilty evidences from his person. He removed his coat and rolled up the right sleeve of his shirt and bared his arm which, more than all the rest, was dyed with the fatal stain. In that action he exposed the source of the bleeding—a deep, clean-cut gash upon its surface.

His eye settled upon the wound with an abstracted expression. Standing there motionless, with the eyes from the portrait on the wall fixed upon him; with that prevailing hue of death upon him; with that lost look in his face; with the melancholy silence about him; he seemed, indeed, the embodiment of the many mysterious attributes of the old house. Standing there, the repository of that awful secret which was soon to set the town in a roar, he gave no token of fear of what might be the ending. Calmly, but with that lost, wandering expression in his eyes, he went about his labor of divesting himself of the testimony

to that night's work. When his face and his neck and his arms were clean of the stains, when he had replaced his clothing with others upon which the witness to the tragedy was wanting, and when he had bound up his arm with his handkerchief, he tore into shreds, one by one, the garments he had worn, and placed them on the fire, watching them as they burnt slowly. And then he drew up a chair near the fire and waited.

Waited until such time as the town-bells, breaking suddenly on his ear, clanged out the story of that night's horrors and gathered the wondering people together with dreadful tidings of murder.

He walked to the window and raised it and looked out. The street, so silent a little while before, was now busy with tramping feet and mysterious whisperings. Doors and windows were opening and shutting violently, and those who had stood talking to men on the pavement from them came out and joined the groups at the corners and spoke with them over what had happened.

In order not to appear incurious Captain Vernon asked of a passer-by what caused the commotion in town?

What! Had he not heard it? No; what was it? Why the whole country around was ringing with it—Mr. Arncliffe had been found mangled and bleeding in the Baron's Grave with his horse lying dead beside him! How did it happen—did Mr. Arncliffe fall in? No; he was murdered, it was said. People who lived near by had heard the cry of murder, and when they went there they found his cloak and heard him groaning in the pit. He was not dead, then, when he was found—was it thought that he would live? He was not dead, but he was insensible. The doctor up at Framleigh said that he could not live through the night.

Strange! Nothing of the cloaked figure!

The person to whom Captain Vernon had been speaking was moving off. A man coming from a little group at the corner brushed past him and turned to look at him.

"Is that you, Waters?" said the new-comer.

"Yes. Is there anything new?"

"I haven't the heart to talk about it! The thing is getting darker and darker every moment! Dan, the gardener, has just come in from the Baron's Grave. He says that another man has been found dead in the pit. The man's face is mangled and disfigured by falling on a sharp rock. There are marks of a struggle where the cloak was found. There is blood on the grass and a bloody dagger was lying near the unknown man!"

"Who is he? Does anybody know him?"

"No. He is a stranger to everybody who has seen him. Nobody knows him."

"What has been done about the matter—have you heard?"

"Every road leading from Alderley is guarded. Mounted men have been sent on the London road with orders to examine everybody going that way. Squire Gillis says that if the murderer be above-ground he'll have him yet. This is the worst night, Waters, that Alderley has ever passed through!" And then the two men separated, each going his way.

Captain Vernon closed the window and resumed his seat by the fire. The old man was still asleep, ignorant of the night's rumors. Would it be better to go to him and make him aware of the reason of the ringing of the bell?

No. Let him sleep in quiet for to-night. To-morrow it would be on everybody's tongue, and he would know all.

Upon his face was an awful calmness as he sat before the fire and listened to the hubbub in the streets. Not the calmness that comes with a quiet mind, but the repose

which comes with the knowledge that to struggle against destiny is in vain.

His life, such as it was, was completed. Now let the past have no phantoms to torture him. But one thing remained for him to do. To make reparation to Mrs. Arncliffe; to gain her forgiveness before he should be gone from her; that, and the end.

With this resolve upon him; with this strange calmness so much at variance with the tumult around him; he extinguished the light and lay down to sleep as peacefully as a child.

And, whilst he slept, the roar without continued, gaining new strength as the hours wore on. Countrymen coming into town at daylight had heard the news already. They had met men, five, ten, fifteen miles off, who had told them the whole circumstance. But with this difference in their accounts; that whilst all agreed that Mr. Arncliffe was certainly killed, reports varied as to the number of men who had been found dead with him. Some stated that two men had been found. Others had it that there were at least ten bleeding companions to his fate.

And ever, where the crowd was greatest, was a little figure to be seen creeping up with a guilty awe upon him and listening with trembling eagerness to such scraps of information as the gossips had to impart. Creeping up, and standing for a while to listen, and then moving away to some other knot of talkers to stand and to listen and to tremble again. Not that he needed any information in regard to the subject of the excited conversation. But he felt that on this night of all nights he must be abroad. He felt that to remain alone with his own thoughts, and with the memory of what he had so lately witnessed, would drive him mad. And so, whilst Captain Vernon slept in quiet in the house in Balfour-street, the single Witness

walked the streets of Alderley until the red sun had risen and was looking down on the Baron's Grave.

And through the long hours of that desolate night the tidings grew and grew in hideous intensity. Carried by a hundred channels the story of the calamity reached London and spread upon the lips of thousands, creating a commotion in the high places of Government and intruding itself, like a thirteenth guest, into the festivities of Society, flushing the cheeks of its devotees. Leaping from mouth to mouth it ran, like a subtile current, everywhere, bringing the thoughtful business-look to the faces of police-inspectors and shrewd detectives. Pausing to look into the newspaper-offices it set the reporters to mounting in hot haste, armed with pencil and portfolio and destined for the scene of blood, and held the slumbering machinery in check awaiting their return. Speeding with the lightning's quickness it followed the electric-wires, rousing from their lethargy the weary operators; giving new food for comment wherever one man was found to speak it and another to listen to it; disturbing the sleep of the innocent and startling the consciences of the bad, and flashing through the land the Sin of Cain!

CHAPTER XXIII

SOCIETY AND THE LAW MEET AT FRAMLEIGH-PLACE.

TH**ERE** is a solemn awe upon city and town and country. There is a terrible sense upon the hearts of all that a dreadful crime has been committed and a helpless sense of ignorance as to who committed it. Government, sitting in easy-chairs in Downing-street, is inconsolable and will not be comforted. For (as the newspapers have duly set forth) a good man and a great man and an honest man has been called from its councils. It might search England over, and it might (as it doubtless would) find other good, great and honest men, but it could never find the equal of the man whom we all deplore.

So is it with Government, and so speaks public opinion through the newspapers. But how is it with the household at Framleigh?

Mrs. Arncliffe has been called from Eden Lodge to her home once more. She has been recalled to Framleigh-Place by a hasty note from the housekeeper, in which it was set forth that Mr. Arncliffe had been found mangled and wounded to death at the Baron's Grave, and that, if she wishes to see him again alive, she must return without delay. She has returned with no delay, to find the household in tears and to be told that Mr. Arncliffe is dead.

The great parlors, dark at the best of times, are darkened now with a more solemn gloom. The portrait of Mr. Arncliffe is draped with crape, and the testimony of grief hangs from the family-pictures on the wall, and from the silver

bell-handle on the front-door, and from the shoulders of the Stately Martyr and Gorgeous Victim, standing, with an expression of genteel wretchedness in their faces, in the hall, and answering questions from incoming Society.

The solemn summons has spread to the ears of Society that all that is mortal of Mr. Philip Arncliffe of Framleigh Place, Alderley, Middlesex, is lying in one of the darkened rooms of his residence, subject to the vulgar examination of a coroner's jury; and, in answer to the summons, have appeared the special friends of the deceased, sorrowful but collected, heart-broken but calm, not to condole with Mrs. Arncliffe, but to see to it that the man whom we all deplore shall not lack those testimonials of respect which shall leave him only at his grave.

Thus is it, then, that, with a sense of duty to our dear friend departed, my Lord has come up from the city accompanied by a Right Reverend Sir, and his Grace has come down from the country accompanied by a Right Honorable Sir, and together it is arranged that they shall, in conjunction with others to be hereafter chosen, when the last moment shall have come, act as pall-bearers. By a pleasant fiction my Lord is made to represent Government, His Grace that mysterious class known as Privileged, the Right Reverend Sir the Church, of which the departed was so conservative and staunch a supporter, and the Right Honorable Sir those interests of the Landed Proprietors (another name for the Privileged class) which the late lamented so consistently upheld.

Lying with that ghastly stillness about it that had come upon it in this interval all that was earthly of Mr. Philip Arncliffe was subject to the inquisitions of Society. Thus lying, there was attached to it that air of grotesque deformity; that sneering look hovering around the proud lip and breaking out of the shapeless visage; that impres-

sive quiet ; that it seemed more like an idol set up by the world in which he had moved, and surrounded by its worshippers, than like something from which the life that had inspired it had fled.

All day, entering and departing, Society in its innumerable shapes crossed the threshold of Framleigh, inspecting and passing judgment upon its late owner. Society in the shape of Government, shaking its head and weighing the dead man's virtues by his legislative influence. Society in the shape of Fashion, examining him through metaphorical eye-glasses and measuring his worth by the elegance of his manners, the excellence of his dinners and the splendor of his establishments. Society in the shape of Finance, standing with feet wide apart and hands, rattling unseen gold, thrust into its capacious pockets, and appraising him at the value of his bank-account, his rent-roll, and his dividends. Society in the shape of the learned Professions, judging him by the brilliancy of his oratory, the profundity of his scholarship, and the delicacy of his satire. Society in the shape of the Church, condensing his merits into praise of his orthodoxy and his religious charities. Society in all its various disguises, commenting upon him and coming to that general conclusion, to which the newspapers had arrived before, that, in the catastrophe which had deprived the country of the departed, a good man and a great man and an honest man had been called from its councils. And never once, thus weighed all day in the balance, was he found wanting ; never once found possessed of the ordinary frailties that beset common men ; never once judged as he was, and disconnected from the adventitious aids of rank and fortune and accomplishments.

There is one little point, however, upon which that portion of Society represented by the hawks, with their wilted progeny by their side, seems inclined to take deferential

issue with him. But even in so doing high tribute is offered to him. And this exceptional judgment pronounced against him, lying there in death, is a well-bred regret that he should so far have forgotten what was due to his class as not to have chosen a wife from his own circle.

It is noticeable, also, that Society, in referring to the manner of the late master of Framleigh's death, forgets, or appears to forget, that there was anything of the common in that death. It rather seems to imply that there was a peculiar lien held by the departed upon that manner of giving up the ghost, to the exclusion of every other mortal's claim.

Thus, it is not, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, a killing or a murder, or even a death. But it appears, from what Society (lounging in the darkened parlors) says, that it is a great public calamity, Sir; a sad affliction, my dear; an unexpected catastrophe, my Lord—a loss to Government and to society of which Mr. Arncliffe was an undoubted ornament; an unforeseen event, your Grace, from which the country cannot recover for a long time. It does not refer, in the remotest manner, to the merely practical view of the matter. It gives no token of remembrance of the memories of blood and mangled mortality which surround his cutting off. It only accepts the fact, as it presents itself, that what was Mr. Arncliffe in life is Mr. Arncliffe in life no more; that it has met to pay the customary tribute to what remains of what was Mr. Arncliffe. No more, no less.

In this view of the case, then, Society has, in a manner, canonized him. It has elevated him into an Idea, and his death into an Unforeseen Event, and it feels that it can, without derogation to the many virtues of the departed, indulge (James) in another glass of sherry and (thank you) in another slice of cake.

Indeed, in their sense of having completed their duty in attending at Framleigh on this melancholy occasion, several of the insipid young men (who are there in troops) leaving for a brief period the side of the artificial young women (who are there as comforters of Mrs. Arncliffe in her affliction) to inquire of the Gorgeous Victim, standing disconsolately at the door, at what time the coroner may be expected, return to their posts of duty with watery eyes and an uncertain articulation, and conveying, through the nostrils of the artificial young women, the belief to the minds of the same that the information so obtained is, in an unaccountable manner and in a remote degree, connected with brandy.

Thus, then, is it with Society in the parlors below. But in the darkened room above-stairs, where kneels the dead man's widow with her special friends, among them Lady Eden, there is weeping and bitterness of spirit. To her comes no calm sense of having performed her entire duty to the mangled figure stretched in revolting deformity upon the stained sheets of the bed. She does not consider that, in crushing the betrayal of her wrong love, she has expiated whatever of sin she had committed in loving *him*. She does not reflect that her love was never her husband's—that holy love of woman which, sooner or later, must come to some man perhaps all unworthy to receive it. She only remembers that she *had* allowed a wrong love to come between her husband and herself. And so, beside his inanimate form, she weeps away her sorrow on her knees.

Oh, woman! young in every attribute that gives assurance of youth—young in years, young in thoughts and girlish fancies, young in knowledge of life; but old in the sorrows that come with disappointed hopes and love unconsecrated; lift up your eyes again! For the one sin wherefore you weep is forgiven you; the one wrong that

blurred your life's purity is pardoned you ; the one act of yours wherein you were found wanting has been blotted out in the balance against you !

Slowly pass the hours until that hour when the ministers of the law shall come to take cognizance of Mr. Arncliffe's mode of death. Slowly pass they to Mrs. Arncliffe, crouching at the pillow's head in her heart's passionate anguish.

There is a terrible suspicion on her mind which she scarcely dares whisper to herself. Where was Captain Vernon on the night before ? Was it his hand that hurled Mr. Arncliffe and the unknown man to their doom ? He had left her at Eden Lodge, after that fatal interview, to return to Alderley. In returning there had he learned that Mr. Arncliffe was at the Baron's Grave, and had he sought him there, and, in the violence of his passions, had he done murder upon him under the influence of the love that he had avowed for her ?

The tears that are falling from her eyes are not alone for her husband, dead before her. In her love for Captain Vernon—a love which, despite the crime which her suspicions attach to him, still holds her under its control—she weeps, too, for him, living, as she does for the man who has fallen a victim to his wrath. If Captain Vernon be guilty of her husband's death, and if she knew this beyond all cavil, she will not betray him to the law. She will not sacrifice him whom she loves above all the world—above herself—to satisfy a law that demands a life for a life. But if he have her husband's blood upon his hands, he will be to her, as dead, henceforth, as is Mr. Arncliffe himself, and she will go to the grave carrying with her her unspoken secret.

Kneeling beside the bed she feels a hand laid gently upon her shoulder. It is Lady Eden, who leads her away.

And then a little light is let in upon the cold, proud face—cold and proud even in its mutilation; and the representatives of the Law are coming up the broad stairway to pass judgment upon that which shall never more ascend them. Coming up to meet Society ranged in sympathetic order along the hall as calm as if it, itself, must not some day go out to meet the inevitable hereafter. Coming up to pass the household gathered about the foot of the stairs and gazing through their tears at the movements of those to whom, they think, all the dark mystery shall be made clear. Coming up to meet the scientific physician from London, who has been there since the moment Mr. Arncliffe breathed his last, and who is prepared to describe minutely the near and remote causes of his death and to prove that, according to all known rules of medical science, that calamity was inevitable under the circumstances. Coming up to meet the eminent legal gentleman, also from London, who has left his dusty office for a space in order to take notes at the inquest on his late client, and who now stands at the bedside with a decorous scented handkerchief in his hand.

Mr. Jarvie, the coroner, a person who seems overwhelmed at the honor that has been forced upon him and whose manner, in view of the presence of the eminent legal gentleman and of the eminent presence of death upon the bed, partakes of the apologetic in consideration of his taking the liberty to hold the inquest at all, enters with his jury and seats himself solemnly.

“A melancholy occasion, sir,” he says finally, to the eminent legal gentleman, shaking his head deprecatingly.

“A melancholy occasion, sir,” echoes the eminent legal gentleman, who in his turn shakes *his* head and looks at the scientific physician.

“A very melancholy occasion, gentlemen,” says the sci-

entific physician, turning to look toward the occupant of the bed, with something of a proprietary expression in his eye. Then they all, the jury included, gaze solemnly in the same direction, their heads shaking in unison.

When this little tribute to the memory of the man whom we all deplore has been offered, Mr. Jarvie proceeds, still with that humble air of taking a liberty, to enter upon an examination of the matter that has brought them together. Speaking in whispers, they finally reach the conclusion that the witnesses should be brought in. In reaching this conclusion they seem to do so helplessly and purposelessly. Especially is this purposeless expression observable in the countenance of the eminent legal gentleman.

Before the examination of the other witnesses, the scientific physician, in the most scientific, not to say incomprehensible, manner sets forth the causes of the master of Framleigh's death. To one of the jurymen, a practical man and as far removed from science as possible, the learned physician's profound analysis seems so far opposed to anything like a fair and comprehensive statement of the case, that he causes a temporary confusion by inquiring of the medical gentleman, in a tone and after a manner that savor strongly of taking a liberty with the defunct, "Are we to understand, sir, that death was produced by Mr. Arncliffe's head being mashed in falling upon a rock?"

When the medical testimony had been recorded, the eminent legal gentleman, turning to Mr. Jarvie, remarked, in a low tone, "Does no suspicion attach to any one but the pedler?"

"I believe the public suspicion affects him only. But active steps are being taken in searching for other clues," returned the coroner.

"I don't see much to convict him in the facts of the case," said the legal gentleman, looking down at his feet.

“But as he is suspected, why of course let us hear what the witnesses have to say.”

The witnesses—among whom was the landlord of the Knight and Dragon—having been introduced, the first thing to be done was to hear evidence as to the finding of the bodies. This evidence having been taken down—several of Mr. Arncliffe’s tenants having satisfactorily settled this point—one witness was chosen from the number that remained and the others were sent back to the next room to wait until they should be wanted. The witness who had been retained, and who looked at the bed and its burden with a pale face, having seated himself at a word from the coroner, the examination, having for its purpose the elucidation of the doubt which attached to the pedler, commenced.

The substance of that examination, as was duly recorded and taken down, was to the effect that there was a pedler who had been seen for a day or two in and around Alderley, and who had excited grave suspicions on the part of the citizens. Among those whose suspicions were thus excited was he—the witness. Why his suspicions were aroused, he couldn’t well say. He believed—indeed such a charge had been brought against the pedler—that he had sold to the citizens counterfeit jewelry and knives that wouldn’t cut after you had bought ’em. He—the witness—had never bought any of this jewelry, but his brother had. His brother was among the witnesses summoned and was in the next room. That was all he knew about the case.

The coroner looked at the eminent legal gentleman with an inquiring eye. The latter nodded his head. Mr. Jarvie then told the witness that he could go. With this permission granted him, the latter picked up his hat from the carpet on which he had placed it, made a rough bow to

those present, and went out with a frightened expression upon his face.

The next witness called—the brother of the man who had just been examined—entered and seated himself, and the examination was resumed.

What did he know about the pedler?

“Well, there were suspicions attached to the pedler—”

The eminent legal gentleman waved his hand. “Never mind that. What about his character—what about his movements last night?”

“Well, judging from his appearance, I should say his character was bad. He had a down look about him—what I’d call a downright bad look. Where he came from I don’t know. He came here with a lot of knives that wouldn’t cut and some plated jewelry. I bought a knife and a brooch—”

“Very well,” said the legal gentleman. “We know about that. But what we want to know is whether you are aware of his movements last night at about the time”—he looked at the coroner for a moment, and, that gentleman answering “eight o’clock,” went on—

“At about eight o’clock, the time when Mr. Arncliffe is supposed to have been injured?”

“I don’t know anything of my own knowledge about that, sir. I only know what I heard a man say.”

“What man?”

“I don’t know his name. He is in the next room now.”

The legal gentleman having again consulted Mr. Jarvie with his eye, that gentleman consulted a paper he held in his hand.

“James Wagstaffe,” he said, after this consultation.

The eminent legal gentleman here nodded his head toward the witness and looked at the door. Mr. Jarvie, fol-

lowing this look, intimated to the latter that he was at liberty to depart.

"Thank you, sir," he said, and departed with very much the same terrified expression as the other who had preceded him.

The next witness introduced proved to be Mr. Wagstaffe. He was an elderly man, gifted with staring eyes which were set off with spectacles. His first action on entering was to remove his glasses and to look around him wildly. His next was to replace them and to stare through them at the silent figure on the bed. His third action, in obedience to a word from the coroner, was to seat himself in the chair with an air of having been thrown into it. The examination then proceeded, the legal gentleman putting the questions.

"You are acquainted, I believe, Mr.—a—"

"Wagstaffe," suggested Mr. Jarvie.

"You are aware, I believe, Mr. Wagstaffe, of the suspicions that rest upon the pedler?"

"I believe I am, sir," returned Mr. Wagstaffe hoarsely.

"You *are* aware of those suspicions?"

"Yes, sir, I *am*."

There was a momentary pause, which the eminent legal gentleman filled up on his part by passing his handkerchief over his face, Mr. Jarvie by coughing apologetically behind his hand, Mr. Wagstaffe by staring at the scientific physician and at the jury who stared at him. When these respective performances had been concluded, the legal gentleman laid his handkerchief upon his lap with a resigned expression and went on to question the witness.

"Will you be kind enough to state, Mr. Wagstaffe, what you know about this pedler's whereabouts at eight o'clock last night?"

"In regards to his whereabouts at eight o'clock," said

Mr. Wagstaffe as hoarsely as before and with a shake of the head, "I must be excused. In regards to where he was, positively, at seven o'clock, I must likewise, gentlemen, beg to be excused. If I see him at all, I see him at six o'clock."

"If you saw him at all? Then you are not certain as to having seen him anywhere last night?"

"No more am I," returned Mr. Wagstaffe, staring fiercely at his questioner with an amazed look. The eminent legal gentleman here happening to look at Mr. Jarvie, that gentleman coughed again in humble deprecation of the words and manner of the witness.

"It was understood—at least Mr. Jarvie understood—that you were prepared to prove that that pedler was seen going out toward the Baron's Grave at six o'clock," said the legal gentleman.

"I am prepared to prove," returned Mr. Wagstaffe, with another obstinate shake of the head, "that I *think* I see him a-going out on the London road at that hour. That's what I am prepared to prove." And then he added warmly, looking at the jury with a renewed stare of defiance, "and I'd like to see any man make me prove more than that!"

"Have you *any* knowledge which might connect this pedler with Mr. Arncliffe's death?"

"No, sir. I happened to make a remark yesterday to the effect that *maybe* it was the pedler whom I saw going out toward the Baron's Grave, about six o'clock, and that's why I was brought up to give my testimony. I have seen the pedler to-day, and he is not the man I saw on the night of the death of Mr. Arncliffe."

"I really don't see, Mr. Jarvie, the necessity of conducting this examination any further," said the legal gentleman when Mr. Wagstaffe had ceased speaking. "I really can't

see that there is a particle of evidence against the suspected party. Have you any other witnesses?"

"There's Briggs, the proprietor of the inn," returned Mr. Jarvie, examining his paper closely. "Why, bless me! Now that I remember, he's the most important witness I have! I think we had better let Mr. Wagstaffe go, sir?" That that was also the opinion of the gentleman referred to was evident. For his wild look was fixed with a hostile meaning upon the ministers of the law present.

"As you say, sir," said the legal gentleman to the coroner. "Certainly! I believe we have no further use for the witness. You can go, sir." Mr. Wagstaffe rose from his chair with a vehemence of manner similar to that with which he had seated himself and, after another long stare at the motionless form on the bed, left the apartment with the air of a man who had suffered an imposition.

"I hope, Mr. Jarvie"—said the legal gentleman, with a professional smile, which he checked immediately, remembering where he was—"that we may be able to prove something by this last witness. It is the most singular examination, sir, at which I have ever assisted. Somebody is guilty, I know, but you will pardon me when I say that, in my humble opinion, you have suspected the wrong party, sir—the wrong party."

"I am afraid I have, sir," replied the coroner, with his deprecating cough. "I really am afraid, sir, that we *have* got hold of the wrong party;" and then he looked at the jury, who looked at each other with something of the purposeless expression that had never yet left the eminent legal gentleman's face.

Mr. Jarvie, who seemed to have become abstracted for a moment over his fear that he had got hold of the wrong party, apparently aroused himself suddenly and proposed that the landlord of the Knight and Dragon should be

brought in. This being, evidently, the proper course to be pursued, Mr. Briggs was ushered in, and the legal gentleman commenced with him as he had done with the others.

"You are the landlord of the Knight and Dragon inn?" said the legal gentleman, when Mr. Briggs had seated himself and had conformed to the necessary preliminaries.

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware of certain suspicions resting upon a pedler who is in custody upon a charge of complicity in Mr. Arncliffe's death?"

"I am aware of those suspicions, sir."

"Very well. Now, will you tell us what you know of his movements about the time of that calamity?"

"I left that pedler," commenced Mr. Briggs, crossing his legs and looking down at the floor with an appearance of profound thought, "when I went out of the parlor of the inn, at six o'clock on the night when Mr. Arncliffe was killed, fast asleep, with his head on the table, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, drunk. He is generally a customer of mine when he is on the tramp, and as he looked so comfortable I didn't like to disturb him. I came back into the parlor at seven o'clock, and I saw him still sleeping there. At eleven o'clock, when I went to shut up shop, I saw that pedler under the table."

"Under the table?" asked the legal gentleman doubtfully.

"Under the table, sir. Under the table as drunk as I ever saw a man."

The eminent legal gentleman shut his eyes as Mr. Briggs said this, and Mr. Jarvie placed his hand to his mouth with a view of coughing; but, thinking better of it, he brought it down again on the table before him.

Nobody seeming to have anything to say at this juncture, the attention of everybody was drawn to one of the jurymen who propounded a query to the landlord.

"Could the pedler have left the inn at seven o'clock and have gone to the Baron's Grave, and there have committed the crime of which he is suspected, and then have returned before eleven?"

"That question is very useless under the circumstances," observed the legal gentleman. "But since it has been asked, let us have the answer of the witness."

"Not unless he was a ghost," replied Mr. Briggs, in answer to the juryman's question.

"What sort of a ghost?" said the same juryman rashly, impelled by a belief that his question was strictly in pursuance of the ends of justice.

"A sober ghost," returned the landlord. "A sober ghost might have left the inn without my seeing him; but if he had been as drunk as that pedler was he would have stumbled and betrayed himself."

The eminent legal gentleman, when the landlord gave this answer, turned to Mr. Jarvie.

"There is no more evidence against this pedler, sir," he observed, "than there is against you or me. It is very plain that a mistake has been made somewhere and that we *have* secured the wrong party."

"I did what I thought to be my duty," returned the coroner apologetically. "The public accusation pointed to that man, and it really does seem as if the public were wrong. I can't understand it. Really it is beyond my comprehension. The mistakes we do make, sometimes, to be sure!" And then he gathered his papers together on the table and said to Mr. Briggs that he need not remain any longer.

When the last witness, in the person of the landlord, had departed, Mr. Jarvie and the jury set their heads together and spoke for a little while in a low tone. And when they arose from that consultation their verdict had freed the

wretched object of suspicion, and the inquest upon Mr. Arncliffe was declared adjourned to Alderley.

When the Law had thus resolved, its representatives present, in the shape of the eminent legal gentleman, Mr. Jarvie and the jury, accompanied by the scientific physician, went slowly down the stairway, followed by the witnesses treading upon each other's heels. Went down, to make Society, awaiting the information, aware that their investigations into the dark mystery that had compelled their attendance at Framleigh had been, so far, fruitless. Went down, to surrender the inanimate clay upstairs into the keeping of its family. Went down, to stand in the great hall, talking in whispers to the reporters who were there also awaiting them, and who in a rapid way took notes of their proceedings. Went down, to partake, solemnly, of the sherry and cake, as if in special tribute to the departed. Went down, to go in a melancholy procession out of the front-door, followed by the witnesses, still with that dreadful impulse of fear upon them, on their way to Alderley, there to continue the same dreary inquisition, in the cheerless room at the police-station, above the unrecognizable remains of the unknown man who had lain side by side with the great man in the darkness.

With the departure of the Law, Society also prepares for its flight. In a solemn way, and with that sense upon it of having accomplished its mission and performed its duty to the memory of the man whom we all deplore, it speeds along the white road in carriages which sparkle and flash in the sunlight—some back to the city, and others back to the country—to return on the next day, and thereafter, and to pay that homage to the departed, lying in state, which it shall be his to receive until the end of all.

Then Mrs. Arncliffe, seeking once more the darkened room and with Lady Eden there to comfort her, weeps

and recalls the mournful prologue to her widowhood. Weeping there, she ponders, in her grief, over the image of that man who, in her suspicions, has indeed been the worst enemy of those who care for him. For *she* has cared for him—*she* has loved him—*she* has wept for him. Too much, perhaps, for her own happiness—too much, as being bound to another!

She has not seen him in the house to-day. Where is he now, and what is he doing?

If she were to rise at this hour and go forth and skirt the fields until she comes to that unfenced tract of ground beyond Alderley, reserved by Christian charity for the resting-place of paupers who have died upon its hands, her thoughts might be answered.

For she would see him standing with folded arms and looking with haggard face upon a new-made grave, untenanted as yet but ready for that which it shall soon contain. She would see him bending down and reading something that is scrawled upon a painted board; something that recalls to him the course of his unhappy life and which he translates into one word: Lost!

And what he reads upon the board is this:

“Found dead at the Baron’s Grave on the night of November 30th. Name unknown. Supposed to have been murdered.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KNIGHT AND DRAGON INN RECEIVES TWO GUESTS
FROM LONDON.

ALDERLEY, during the long hours when the inquest was being held at Framleigh, was still ringing with surmises. There was no man—one excepted—who could have pointed with certainty to the active agent in the mystery of the Baron's Grave, and that one man who might have spoken preserved an obstinate silence.

Notwithstanding the triumphant vindication of the unhappy pedler's innocence, as shown by Mr. Briggs's testimony, that suspected party still remained, among the gossips, the scapegoat of popular execration. It was necessary that somebody should bear the suspicion of guilt, and in consideration of the friendless position of the accused, and in consideration also of the fact that divers of those most loud in denouncing him had suffered from his fraudulent transactions and had lost money by his operations, the pedler, in the public estimation, presented the strongest claims for the general opprobrium.

A variety of cogent reasons was advanced by the gossips corroborative of the pedler's guilt. In the first place, he had but one arm; in the second place, nobody knew him and he had appeared suddenly in the town two days before the tragedy, and had all along been suspected of being a housebreaker in disguise; in the third place, he had a peculiar manner about him which indicated a proneness to

commit crimes of the sort laid to his charge—a manner which took the shape of presenting him as looking askance when speaking to a party, and of walking in a slouching way, both of which attributes, the gossips declared, had been possessed by criminals from time immemorial. And so, in default of a better, the miserable pedler, at that time on his way to London, still continued, although acquitted by the coroner's jury, an object of suspicion.

But these continued suspicions were unknown to at least two of the residents of Alderley. And these two were Captain Vernon and Mr. Creech, the tobacconist. The one had closed his shop while the inquests were in progress, and the other had held no communication with the world without and had not sought to inform himself upon the precise course of events.

Upon the tobacconist, now that the machinery of law was at work, rested an appalling dread of meeting his fellow-townsmen. He felt that, if he should do so, there would come some evidence of what he deemed his complicity in the death of Mr. Arncliffe and the unknown. Some word uttered by him, some intimation on his part of a knowledge of the terrible truth, would betray him, and he would become inextricably involved in the mystery that haunted him. For, would he not be questioned as to his presence at the Baron's Grave at that hour of the night? Would his uncorroborated explanation that he had hoped, by following Captain Vernon and the cloaked figure, to solve the problem that the house in Balfour-street concealed be of avail in satisfying the law? And again, might not Captain Vernon, maddened at the exposure, publicly proclaim him—Mr. Creech—as his accomplice and right-hand man; might he not go so far as to say that he—Mr. Creech again—had done for the unknown party whilst Captain Vernon attended to Mr. Arncliffe? Under any circumstances, sup-

posing that Captain Vernon should remain silent in the face of his testimony, what assurance would he have that his statement, incredible as it would be, would be accepted as the truth by the law?

Mr. Creech had already been in the hands of justice. He could not forget that, on that occasion, he had been convicted against his own senses of having inveigled a weak and trusting woman into a promise of marriage and of having then basely deserted her. No, no! He would let matters take their course and patiently await the result.

With Captain Vernon the case was different. He was awaiting, with that strange calmness that had fallen upon him when he had gone to sleep with the turmoil in his ears, the proper time to fulfil his last obligation and to make his last reparation. That it would come, sooner or later, he knew, and in this knowledge and with the resolve that he had made, it mattered little to him what passed beyond the portals of the old house and how wagged Rumor with her hundred tongues. Blacker, going and coming, would sometimes essay to draw him into conversation on the subject of Mr. Arncliffe's death by telling him what was said in Alderley upon the subject; but he would check him and say that it would be better to let the dead rest in quiet, and that, in God's good time, all men would know where lay the blame and whom to hold responsible. It was only when Blacker had informed him that the agents of the law had caused the grave of the unknown man to be dug, in readiness for the remains when the law should have done with them, that he had told him to remain in the house during his absence and had gone out under the lion's head to seek the dead man's future resting-place, and to read the inscription lying carelessly at its side, declaring that the unknown was supposed to have been murdered.

Away from Framleigh the day has been a busy one with

others beside Society. The road leading out toward Framleigh-Place, and on to the Baron's Grave, was thronged with the pilgrims who had come up from London on that morning. Some on foot, some on horseback, some in carriages. There was a small group standing before the park-gates and questioning the gate-keeper in regard to Mr. Philip Arncliffe, his habits, manners and general appearance. This group had a rapid, careless way about them, and the gate-keeper observed with some alarm that they jotted down, in little books in which there were a great many blank leaves, and in a language that he did not understand, whatever he might utter upon the subject. He observed, too, that occasionally they would look over each other's shoulders and upon each other's writing, and would then go on jotting down as rapidly as before.

There was another gathering, a little farther off, busily engaged in sketching the great house with its accompaniments of statues and leafless trees and silent fountain. These, too, the gate-keeper observed anxiously. What had come to pass with the old home of the Arncliffes since its master's death, that every particular connected with him should be noted down by strange gentlemen with a rapid way about them, and every pillar and window and florid ornament of the fabric of Framleigh should be subjected to the scrutiny of foreign-looking gentlemen, bending down to observe the statues more closely through the colonnade of trees?

To a question asked by the gate-keeper, looking to a solving of this mystery, one of the gentlemen answered that what they were writing there was intended for the world; that it would all be published in the newspapers soon—not mentioning, however, that it would take the shape of a "Statement of Mr. James Martin, an intelligent and faithful retainer of the late Philip Arncliffe, Esq., M. P.,

and for a long time gate-keeper at Framleigh-Place, giving much interesting information concerning the lamented deceased, never before published."

The gate-keeper also learned that the work upon which the foreign-looking gentlemen were engaged was also intended for the world, and that it, also, would appear in the papers. He did not know, then, however, (what he was destined to know at a later day), that the world would be indebted to the kindness of the Household at Framleigh-Place for this correct and faithful delineation of the magnificent Residence and Grounds of the truly great Englishman whose Unexpected Departure we all deplore.

When all the information that could possibly be obtained was drawn from the gate-keeper, and when the sketches were completed, the rapid writers and the foreign-looking gentlemen went off in troops toward the Baron's Grave.

The sun which had risen since the tragedy at the Baron's Grave, passing away, had left Alderley in darkness. Darkness of understanding in the matter of the calamity that had befallen it, and darkness of earth, had settled upon the town. In that double night men belated in lonely streets progressed with hasty steps, casting anxious looks behind, and doubting but that from some alley might spring that hidden hand, red with its gory attribute, to do murder again. The sense of the unavenged and inexplicable crime that had been committed on the person of one so high removed from vulgar contact as Mr. Philip Arncliffe, linked with the awful ignorance felt by all men in regard to him who had been found side by side with the bloody dagger and with face mangled almost beyond recognition, weighed heavily upon the minds of all. From this ignorance sprang vagrant and fantastic fears which brought pallor of cheek and sickness of heart

to those who moved within that magic circle. Was it given to any man to say that the assassin was not abroad, on *this* night, armed with plenary power to kill and maim? Was it beyond the fairest supposition to suppose that even *now* in some dark abode he was planning that which, if accomplished, would appal the stoutest heart that yet held out against the horror of the double crime? There was no prophet there to declare that the brain that had conceived and the hand that had carried out the hideous work of death were idle for want of material to work upon. Who said that he or they had left Alderley and had gone to London? Could not a murderer—especially if unsuspected—hide in Alderley as well as in London? And more than this; the hand which on that night of blood was raised to kill was no common hand. There had been no robbery. Upon the person of Mr. Arncliffe had been found all his valuables. On the person of the unknown man had been found a diamond pin and nearly £5, money of the realm. Therefore let no man say that the circle of Murderer's work was rounded. Murderer was crafty, for he had thus far evaded pursuit and detection. Murderer was cruel, for he had slain without remorse. Murderer was strong, for he had coped with two men successfully. Therefore let all men pray that Murderer might, in mercy, stay his hand.

In the room at the police-station to which the inquest had been adjourned from Framleigh, sat the coroner and several magistrates, among them Sir John Eden, listening to additional testimony, receiving reports of policemen, answering telegraphic despatches from a distance, giving information through the same channel to the officers of justice elsewhere, and holding themselves in readiness for whatever might transpire. In the corner of the room lay, extended, a silent, motionless object—an object which

nobody seemed anxious to inspect and which everybody seemed rather to avoid—covered with a faded piece of carpet. From this object, bearing the human shape, a dark, slender stream trickled away along the floor, losing itself finally in a crevice. As the agents of the law consulted, their glances at intervals were turned upon this silent companion of their consultations with a grave, doubtful meaning.

The twilight deepening into night brought with it the hoarse whistle of the approaching train from London.

It came up laboring heavily, for it bore an unwonted freight upon it. London had sent up a strong embassy to look into the merits and demerits of that which had so lately made Alderley famous.

There were loungers there who had come up to look at the Baron's Grave and to return to make report to expectant friends. There were additional artists who had come up to take drawings of the Baron's Grave, in which a miniature Red Sea, divested of its waters, would convey to the readers of the illustrated newspapers a faithful representation of this now famous locality. There were additional gentlemen of the press who had come up to furnish to the readers of the daily and the weekly sheets a full and impartial account—divested of all absurd rumors and old-woman suppositions—of the melancholy event which we, in common we are bold to say with even the gentlemen who sit upon the Opposition benches, most sincerely deplore. And there also came up sundry ministers of the law, who had left London to consult with their fellow-ministers of the law in Alderley as to the readiest method of detecting the perpetrator, or perpetrators, of the crime.

A great bustling was apparent around the station, and the men connected with the road and the few others there, residents of Alderley, were beset with a thousand questions.

Had any new development taken place? No; everything was as dark as before. Was it true, as was stated in London, that a pale, flickering light had been seen hovering about the Baron's Grave on the night preceding the murders? This was possible they—the questioned parties—answered; but they had not heard of it. Was it true, as was also stated in London, that an immense number of jewels, in the way of diamonds, pearls and opals had been found upon the body of the unknown man, leading to the supposition that he was an eccentric character who had expended a vast fortune in the purchase of precious-stones? This, again, was possible, although the authorities had allowed nothing to transpire beyond the discovery upon his person of a diamond-cluster which exceeded in value—so it was reported—the money in the Bank of England.

And then the great throng scattered, wending their way to the various houses of public entertainment, there to wait until the next day's sun should arise and give them light to proceed on their respective researches.

The Knight and Dragon was beset on all sides by a crowd of anxious inquirers, all demanding of the landlord entertainment for a night and a day. The landlord was put to it to accommodate so unwonted a press upon the Knight and Dragon's capabilities. There hadn't been such a crowd present at the inn—according to his own words—since the time when his late Gracious Majesty passed through Alderley on his way to visit the provincial towns. But finally, by dint of furbishing up old rooms, and calling into use beds that had been in disuse for half a century, the Knight and Dragon was put in a fit condition to receive its clamorous guests. In the interval before the call to supper, the landlord, impressed with the laudable desire of entertaining those who had honored the inn with their presence on that night, and in order also to distract attention

from what was going on above-stairs, depicted in vivid colors, to those assembled around the fire in the back parlor, what had occurred in the matter of the discovery of the bodies, the inquests, and so on.

Among the listeners to the landlord's account were two men who sat together and apart from the rest. About these men was a calm appearance which contrasted strangely with the excitement and wonder displayed by the others.

During the most startling portions of the narrative they gave no evidence of surprise; but accepted the whole as a fact, and every successive link in the story as a consequent upon that which immediately preceded it. To the unobservant eye these men would have seemed listless and careless. To the practical man of observation they would have seemed alert and professional.

Speaking together in whispers, they waited until the guests had, one by one, retired to the repast which the landlord had managed to prepare. Then they approached him, standing by the fire and observing them with an inquisitive eye.

"Landlord," said one of them who was apparently the spokesman for the occasion, "do we understand you to say there is no clue yet to the guilty party?"

"None has been found yet. Some people have suspicions, but nothing positive is known."

"Suspicions? In what quarter?"

"A pedler—"

The stranger, with a peculiar wave of his hand, checked him.

"Yes, we know all about that. We will not speak of the pedler now. No other suspicions?"

A sudden gleam came upon the landlord's face as the guest of the Knight and Dragon asked this question. For

the first time since the tragedy, the thought of the mystery of the house in Balfour-street flashed across his mind. Why might not that unknown man who dwelt there have some knowledge of the crime? Why might not he, a stranger in Alderley and with strange purposes, throw light upon this hidden mystery? He was not unknown to Mr. Arncliffe, for he had been to Framleigh. He was strong in body and passionate in nature and secret in action; therefore, why might he not be connected, even in a remote degree, with Mr. Arncliffe's death?

When the stranger had asked if there were no other suspicions, the landlord's first impulse was to answer "No;" but when, in the next moment, his mind dwelt upon that old cause of quarrel which had brought dissension to Alderley with the theories that had originated in regard to it, he changed the tenor of his reply.

"The authorities," he said, "have no other suspicions. They believe the murderer has left Alderley and has gone to London; but I believe"—and here his voice sank to a whisper as he looked around the room—"I believe that he is still here!"

"Here? Where?"

"Here in Alderley."

The man who had been questioning the landlord looked with a meaning look at his companion, who nodded his head in answer and leaned carelessly against the mantel-piece.

"You have your own suspicions, then? Tell me, now, whom you suspect."

The landlord hesitated. He assumed a serious responsibility in suspecting at all. He would assume a more serious responsibility in naming the object of his suspicions. The stranger, observing this hesitation, walked slowly up to him.

"See here," he said. "If you have any well-founded cause of suspicion it is my duty, and it is the duty of my friend here, to know it. We are not questioning you from curiosity merely, but to subserve the ends of justice; we are officers of the law. Now, therefore, who is the object of your suspicion?"

"A man who lives here, and who is a stranger here, and who calls himself Captain Horace Vernon," answered the landlord.

When the landlord spoke of Captain Vernon the two men glanced again at each other. A sudden look of intelligence passed between them.

"That will do, Limerick," said the man who had been leaning against the mantelpiece. "I think we had better look around a little now. The landlord, here, can go with us. He can show us the house and the place where the body is exposed."

"All right, Masters. Landlord, get your hat and come with us, and show us where this Captain Vernon lives."

The landlord removed his hat from a peg on which it was hanging, and, calling to a boy in the tap-room on the side of the parlor to look sharp about him during his absence, walked with the two men toward the passage leading to the street. Standing at the entrance, he placed his hand upon the shoulder of the man nearest him.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "in saying that I suspected Captain Vernon, I asserted nothing and meant to assert nothing. If you were to ask me *why* I suspect him, I should say that I suspect him because to see a man whom nobody knows shutting himself up and keeping away from the world is suspicious. That is my reason, gentlemen, and I want to be put right on the record."

"Very well, landlord; we understand that; you shan't suffer. So come along," replied the man addressed as

Masters. And then they went out on the street and walked in the direction of the old house.

On their way the landlord informed his companions of the various surmises that had arisen in regard to Captain Vernon and his business in Alderley. He even went so far as to air his own theory in the matter—the Warlick theory—and requested their opinion upon the subject. When he mentioned ten years as the limit of Warlick's concealment, Masters laughed slightly and said that he did not remember the case referred to; but that it was not probable that Captain Vernon would remain for that number of years where he was then, without some knowledge of him and his history getting abroad.

Passing the old house slowly, the landlord spoke to his companions. "This is the house, gentlemen," he said; "I'd bet the Knight and Dragon, good will and all, that he's now in that room in which the light is burning."

The men glanced up, but made no answer to the landlord's remark. They were satisfied, apparently, in learning the location of Captain Vernon's house.

The strangers stood before the front-door of the house in Balfour-street for a moment, a little apart from the landlord, engaged in a whispered conversation. Their eyes were turned at intervals upon the lighted window and at intervals upon the door. In the darkness, as if, indeed, instinct with a sort of deadly awakening, the lion's head above the entrance stared down upon them with a seeming menace about its snarling lips.

"Now, landlord," said one of the men, finally, "lead us to the police-station."

Under the guidance of the landlord the two men, silent and thoughtful, threaded the quiet streets until they had reached a building before which was grouped an excited but not clamorous assemblage.

"Here is the place," observed the landlord as they joined themselves to the crowd hanging like a fringe about the door.

"Thank you. Now, remember," said, in a whisper, the man addressed as Masters, "not a word."

"Not a word," repeated Mr. Briggs.

With that injunction they left him standing alone and worked their way, through the gathering, to the door. For a moment they stood there speaking in low tones to the policeman on duty. Then the door opened to admit them, giving to the loungers without a brief glance at the magistrates sitting before the table, at the jury sitting sedately in their chairs, at the silent figure in the corner covered with the folded carpet, at the reporters for the press taking rapid notes, at the tremendous machinery of the law slowly weaving the toils wherein the law-breaker should be entrapped and hunted down.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. CREECH'S DREAM IS REALIZED.

TO the assemblage on the pavement, patiently awaiting some intimation of what was transpiring within, the minutes lagged heavily after the closing of the door upon the two strangers who had come up with the landlord. After a little while, however, a rumor circulated that the two men who had thus entered were Masters and Limerick—the latter the great London criminal detective; but the purpose of their interview was as yet a matter of surmise. The landlord had discreetly held his peace in accordance with the suggestion from Masters, and no intimation had been given to the gossips, by him, of what had occurred. Therefore the crowd surrounding the station-house was drifting helplessly, so to speak, upon the sea of doubt without compass or helm.

In the astounding news of the tragedy that had taken place at the Baron's Grave Alderley had lost sight of what had before claimed all its attention. The house in Balfour-street and its mysterious occupant were forgotten. There existed—there could exist—no connection in their minds between the house and its tenant and the death of Mr. Arncliffe. What had been a mere gossiping recreation on their part had yielded to a realization of all that they had ever conceived of the terrible in the crimes that

had come to affright them, and which had brought with it that sense of utter helplessness which led them to hurry homeward when the all-exposing sun had left the earth to all-concealing darkness.

Patiently waiting for some clue to what was transpiring within, the idlers without were finally gratified when, at the opening of the door, Limerick came out into the street. He was followed almost immediately by Masters and two other men.

As the four men walked away, here and there individual members of the crowd, dropping out of the gathering, seemed inclined to follow Masters and his companions; but the detective waved them back with his hand. Leaving his companions at the corner Masters walked toward the Knight and Dragon, and Limerick and the other men went down the street. When they had reached the stables from which Captain Vernon had been in the habit of engaging Black Dick, they stopped for a moment. The detective was about to give his companions certain directions as to their future movements.

"You, Watts," he said to one of the men, "will stand at the corner above; and you, Carter, will stand at the corner below. Let there be nothing suspicious in your movements; but keep a careful watch on the house. If Captain Vernon—you know the man—should attempt to leave the house, arrest him immediately and take him to the Squire's office. Do you understand?"

"We understand you, Mr. Limerick," responded one of the men.

"Dead or alive," continued the detective, "remember, he must not escape you."

The two policemen—for such they were—touched their hats and moved away in the direction of the old house to fulfil their mission. Then the detective pushed open the

wide door that barred his entrance to the stables, and walked in.

Mr. Chivers, the proprietor, sat at the farther end of the stables before the fire smoking his pipe. Sanders, the groom, stood beside him, and they both looked up as he entered.

The detective, walking toward them, heard Sanders say to the proprietor, "That's the cove that come up in the train to-night. That's Limerick, the Lunnun detective."

He approached the proprietor, who did not look at him in the most friendly manner.

"Where can I find John Chivers, owner of these stables?" he asked.

"You needn't go very far, sir, which I say so because I'm John Chivers," replied the proprietor.

"Then, Mr. Chivers, I wish to ask you a few questions. I overheard your friend there"—pointing to Sanders—"tell you that I was Limerick, the London detective. So reflect well upon your answers. I will not ask you any question you will find it hard to answer."

Mr. Chivers turned nervously in his seat, the better to look at the detective, and removed his pipe from his mouth the better to listen. His visitor had taken a memorandum-book from his pocket and was looking over the leaves. Having found the page he desired, and having consulted it for a moment, he commenced to question the proprietor.

"You have a horse in your stables known as 'Black Dick'—have you not?"

"Yes sir, and the best horse in my stables. Nothing wrong about Black Dick, I hope? I got him at a bargain at the horse-fair in Little Bradbury last year, which Sanders knows is the truth and saw me give £50 for him."

"Oh no, Mr. Chivers. Black Dick is all right so far as that goes. You hire him out occasionally, do you not?"

"That's what Black Dick's for. If I didn't hire him out he wouldn't pay for his oats."

"Was Black Dick hired out three days ago?"

Mr. Chivers looked up inquiringly at the groom. "Three days ago yesterday," he said, "was Monday. Wasn't that the day Sir John Eden was in town, Sanders?"

"Sir John Eden he come down on Tuesday, Mr. Chivers, and that was the day as Captain Vernon got Black Dick on. I marked it in the book myself."

"You're right, Sanders." Then turning to the detective, Mr. Chivers added, "A gentleman here, strange in his ways, and unbeknown to all, which come here over a month ago, and ever since shut up in the old house down the street here, called Captain Vernon, and rode out to Eden Lodge with Sir John on last Tuesday, which I remarked to Sanders at the time—"

"Do you remember when this Captain Vernon returned?" said the detective, interrupting the flow of Mr. Chivers's remarks.

"He came back the next night—the night when they found Mr. Arncliffe and the other man down at the Baron's Grave. He looked angry-like when he came in then, and said in his bold way, 'Here, my man, here's Black Dick. I was in a hurry to return and rode him pretty fast,' and then he walked out again, without so much as a 'good-night to ye.'"

"At what hour was that?"

"Nearly seven o'clock in the evening. I heard the whistle from the London train before he came in."

"When he left here in what direction did he go; up or down?"

"He went down the street—toward where he lives."

"Did you see him out that night again?"

"No, sir. I shut up the stables when he went out, and

went away. Sanders sleeps here and he might ha' seen him."

Sanders hadn't seen anything, however, it appeared, and the detective went on.

"You do not know, then, whether this Captain Vernon went back to his house here in Balfour-street, or not, when he left Black Dick at the stables?"

"I don't know; which I couldn't say whether he went back or not; and if you was to keep on a-asking for a week, I'd still tell the truth and nothing but the truth."

In his bewilderment, caused by the questions that had been put to him, Mr. Chivers was gradually becoming more oracular in his answers and more impressed with the belief that he was undergoing a certain kind of legal examination. He chose his language, therefore, with an eye to that fact.

The detective, glancing upon the book in his hand, spoke again.

"Who are the neighbors of this Captain Vernon?"

"I don't know much about 'em. I only know one of 'em—Mr. Creech, a tobacconist."

"Very good. Could I gain any information from him, in regard to Vernon's habits—whether he were in his house, or not, at such and such an hour on a given night?"

"Creech *might* tell you. *He* used to look out for him all day from his shop opposite. And this he told me himself."

"Ah? Creech—tobacconist—is that the name?" asked the detective, writing in his book.

"That's the name, sir. Thomas Creech, Tobacconist, Balfour-street, Alderley. Sign of the Chinee-man at the door."

The detective replaced his book in his pocket.

"What has passed between us," he said, fixing his eye upon the two men with a serious look, "must be secret,

you know. The questions you have answered have been asked by the law. You know what that means, I suppose?"

"I know what it means," replied Mr. Chivera. "It means we mustn't blab."

"Just so. And now, good-night." And then the detective walked through the stables and into the street.

In a few moments thereafter he was standing at the front-door of Mr. Creech's shop and knocking to bring down its occupant. The noise of a window opening above him caused him to look up. A pallid face, staring down out of it, and a trembling voice demanding to know, in weak accents, what was wanted, startled him, self-possessed as he usually was.

"I want the owner of this shop—one Thomas Creech. Are you he?"

The wretched little man was about to answer "No;" but there was something in the detective's face that forced the truth from him. He therefore admitted that he *was* Thomas Creech.

"Then come down; I want to speak with you."

The face disappeared and the window descended with a loud jar. Waiting for the tobacconist, the detective looked across the street. The men were at their posts, one at each corner, and the house over the way gave no evidence of its being the abiding-place, at that moment, of any living thing. The windows—one window excepted—were barred and fastened, and every protruding part of the building was white with the dust that had thickly settled upon it.

At the opening of the door behind him the detective turned. Mr. Creech was standing behind the door and gazing out anxiously. Briefly, and to the point, the detective questioned him. He—the tobacconist—must look sharp in his answers; did he know one Captain Vernon,

who lived over the way, by sight? Yes, he knew him by sight. Had he—the tobacconist again—seen him enter, or leave, the house over the way on the night of Mr. Arncliffe's death, and, if so, at what hour?

Then a ghastly pallor came over Mr. Creech's face. Speaking, in his fear of the consequences, mysteriously, he implored the detective not to have him punished for it. He told his questioner that he had followed Captain Vernon on that night and had seen it all; that he would go with him and tell what he knew; that he had been frightened and, therefore, had not spoken about it since the occurrence.

This confession was even more than the detective had anticipated. He had thought that possibly Mr. Creech could throw some light on the mystery of Mr. Arncliffe's death; but in the avowal that the latter had just made he read the clearing up of the terrible doubt which enveloped the tragedy at the Baron's Grave.

"Come with me," he said to the tobacconist. "Tell what you know and trust to me."

And then Mr. Creech, accompanied by the agent of the law, went up the street to find his dream realized, and to give his evidence before the coroner as to the hour at which the foreigner had reached, and the hour at which he had left, the house in Balfour-street, and as to what had followed his departure.

When they reached the magistrate's office the idlers were still hanging about the doors. They made way for the detective and the little tobacconist to pass, and strained their ears to listen to what the latter was saying. They heard enough to know that he was speaking of the tragedy. This fact, taken in connection with the other fact of the terrified expression on his face, led to surmises which were nearer the truth than were most of the surmises usually in-

dulged in by the gossips. It was industriously circulated in the crowd that Mr. Creech knew all about it. He had been overheard narrating his dream to the detective, and this gave rise to a rumor that he had dreamed all about it and that he was going before the coroner to offer, in evidence, his dream as a clue to the guilty party or parties. And so, amid all manner of wild beliefs, the door closed on the detective and the tobacconist, and the idle, lounging, gossiping crowd waited, lounged and gossipped as the moments passed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HUNTED DOWN.

IN the silence that pervades the house in Balfour-street, no echo of what was transpiring without disturbed the repose of dusty passage and silent room. No movement was there, save the tremulous motion of the spiders' webs clinging to the mouldy walls and vibrating as the wind swept past them from broken shutter and hidden crevice. No movement in the figure of Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, watching the embers of the fire in the room in which he was born.

The hours that had seen the sun rise found him sitting there, and the hours that saw the sun waning in the west left him there. In his look was no anger, in his eye no passion. The development of that awful destiny which was his had brought with it a passionless calmness. He had accepted it with all the solemn responsibilities it had brought with it, and he was awaiting that inevitable moment which, he knew, was to come, and when he was to leave the house in Balfour-street—perhaps forever. Not to leave it only, however. But to take leave, in that departure, of that which had brought repentance to his obdurate heart—the presence of the woman who wept, in an early widowhood, for what had come to her through act of his.

The deepening shadows—shadows that gathered with the waning sun—came in through the window and mingled

their gloom with the gloom that was native to the old house. The portrait on the wall, looking down on him, became instinct with motion in the uncertain light. To Captain Vernon, gazing at it, the face wore something of the sad look he had seen in his mother's eyes when the tears were wont to fill them in those wild, wrong days of his youth—days when she spoke to him of his errors and besought him to lead a better life. In the bitterness that comes with a repentance almost too late, he knelt beside his chair and buried his face in his hands. And then he prayed—as he had often prayed at his mother's knee—for peace and quiet and forgiveness.

When he had risen he went to the door and called for the old man.

"Blacker," he commenced, when the old man had seated himself, "the time for reparation has come at last. The death of Mr. Arncliffe has removed the last obstacle to Bertha's knowledge of the truth. She must know it to-night."

"Time enough," returned the old man mournfully, shaking his head as he spoke.

"Perhaps," Captain Vernon went on, "so far as regards this knowledge, it is better that she alone should be the possessor of the secret. We do not know how *he* would have received the announcement. It is *her* secret, and if it be that any tears are to be shed for it, those tears will not fall because of his proud wrath."

"No, no! Not now, not now!"

Pausing for a moment, and looking absently into the fire, Captain Vernon gave himself up to thought. Thought, which brought in its train the recollection of what was to be the final expiation. Thought, which led him, finally, to speak to his companion concerning himself.

"Blacker," he said with this absent look upon him, "do

you remember, when the dust fell upon me on the night of my arrival here, that I said if I were superstitious I might think strangely of that circumstance?"

"Yes, I remember, Arthur."

"Well, I am not superstitious; but I feel as if we are to part to-night."

"Part? Why part, Arthur?"

"Do you remember what I said to you in speaking of Monsieur Raphael—that he was involved in my destiny?"

"Yes; I remember that, also."

"What I said then may have seemed strange to you. But, unless my presentiments deceive me, you will know to-night why I made that declaration. You will know to-night who was the unknown man found in the Baron's Grave."

"Then it was he?" said the old man slowly, with a dreadful suspicion forming in his mind—a suspicion to which he did not dare give utterance in words.

"Yes, it was Monsieur Raphael."

With the growing suspicion upon him—that ghastly belief almost changed into a certainty when he reflected upon the fact that Captain Vernon had reached the house in Balfour-street on the night upon which Mr. Arncliffe had been found dead—Blacker covered his face with his hands.

"You suspect me, Blacker?" asked Captain Vernon calmly.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!"

"Appearances are against me, I know," Captain Vernon continued; "but I am innocent."

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!"

"Think you, if I were guilty and had wished to preserve my life by flight, I could not have escaped on the night of the death of Mr. Arncliffe and Monsieur Raphael? Was

not the path opened to me at that time? Could I not have been, at this hour, beyond the reach of the pursuers?"

"If, innocent as you are, there be any fear that you may be held answerable for the consequences, oh, why did you not escape, then! Look, Arthur," he continued, approaching the window and gazing out into the street, "even now the coast is clear, even now there is a chance to escape!"

"No, Blacker. But for one circumstance I would have gone away. What that circumstance is you need not know; but it has held me here. I have been too long the sport of fortune; with nothing to hope for, why should I wish to save my life! Men who are happy may pamper and preserve their lives. I would not take a dog's chance with the world again, leading the miserable, persecuted existence that has been mine for nearly ten years, to insure my safety. Should I be called to account for this act I shall declare myself guiltless and leave to chance the vindication of my innocence. I am weary of freedom connected with a cowardly, skulking life, fearing to meet every man's eye and avoiding pursuers. I expect those here, at every moment, who shall come to claim me. I am only surprised that they have not come before. But they are on my track, and when they come they must find me here—where I was born!"

He struck the table with his clenched hand in his old way and, as if in echo, a dull sound came to his ears, rising from the hall below. He lifted his head to listen to it. Was it something that had fallen to the floor and had it produced that sound?

He passed his hand through his hair and brushed it from his face. Then he rose and stood beside the table, as he had stood on the night of Monsieur Raphael's arrival.

Again and again he heard it. No doubt, now, of its

meaning. The iron knocker was proclaiming that another visitor stood under the lion's head, demanding admittance.

Blacker looks inquiringly at Captain Vernon. Captain Vernon answers the look. "Do not keep them at the door. Go down and show them up," he says.

He speaks with the strange calmness that has made itself apparent in his manner since his resolve to confront his destiny. Leaning against the mantelpiece, after the old man's departure, he waits until his visitors shall be announced. He hears them in the passage below; not one man, or two men, but what seems to him, listening to them, a hundred men. The sound of their heavy footsteps, and the creaking of the stairs as they ascend, are as audible to him as if he were among them.

They are in the passage now, and now they are huddled about the door. He hears a deep voice answer, in response to a question from one of them, "Let Watts and Carter remain in the passage here. I will go in."

The door opens and a figure stands in the doorway. The figure of the man who had been addressed as "Masters" in the conversation between the landlord and the two detectives at the Knight and Dragon inn. Walking to where Captain Vernon stands, he lays his hand upon his arm.

"It's a hard thing, Captain Tyrrel," he says; "but I must do my duty. I arrest you in the name of the Queen."

Captain Vernon's eye falls with a surprised look upon the speaker. "Ha! Is that you, Masters?" he says.

"Yes. Luck would have it that I should be in London when the Frenchman informed on you. It's a strange chance, Captain, but not stranger than I have known in my time."

"How many men have you brought with you? One man would have been enough to do this work. How many

have you in the passage there?" asks the Captain with a touch of anger in his tone.

"I have two of the Alderley police with me. They come on the new charge."

"The new charge? So! The authorities suspect me, then. I knew they would."

"Come, Captain. We don't suspect in this case, only, I'm afraid. I think it's a clear case against you. Was it the Frenchman who cut you in the arm there?" The detective points to his wounded arm and smiles slightly.

"If you suppose," replies Captain Vernon slowly, "that I was about to deny that I was present when Mr. Arncliffe and Monsieur Raphael were killed, you are wrong. I was there, but they both met their deaths by accident. I want you to remember that. When did Monsieur Raphael betray me?"

"On the morning of the day he was killed—that is to say on Wednesday morning—he came to the police-station in London in answer, as he said, to the offer of £100 reward in the *Times* for your recovery, and told us of your whereabouts. He was to have come up to-night with me to point you out and to receive the balance of the reward offered. I happened to be at the post at the time, and so I came up here to identify you. When we saw the Frenchman's diamond pin described in the newspapers this morning, together with the description of his person, we knew who the unknown man was and knew also where to look for the guilty party. I have given my evidence at the inquest and have identified the unknown man as Raphael Saint Elme, and as the man who informed upon you. I hope, Captain, you may prove your innocence; but it looks to me like a dead-set against you."

"How did you know I was wounded? Who told you of that?"

"A dagger was found in the pit with blood upon it—"

"I know it," interrupts Captain Vernon. "Go on."

"No wound from a knife could be found on either Mr. Arncliffe or the Frenchman. Blood on the grass near the edge of the Baron's Grave; and if I am any judge of such matters, the stiffness of your right arm and your swollen hand tell the rest. I won't swear to it, but I feel certain that he cut you there."

"You are right. He did strike me on the arm with his dagger; but in so doing he was the agent of his own destiny. It was in cutting me that he broke my hold on him, and it was in rushing away from me that he fell into the pit. I tell you this and you may repeat it if you like. Whatever may be the result, I have no purpose to shirk *this* responsibility. But what brought him back to Alderley last night—do you know?"

"No. He said nothing about coming here until he should return with me. He had received a part of the money for informing on you and he was to have received the rest when you should be identified."

"*You* do not know why he came here; but I do. He came here to look at the man whom he had betrayed. He came to feast his hatred on the sight of the man who had never injured him and against whom he had turned informer. He was watching for me somewhere. He followed me that night to the Baron's Grave, wondering, perhaps, where I was going, and it was after Mr. Arncliffe had fallen over, and when I was turning to leave the place, that I discovered him creeping off. His blood is on his own head. He laughed at destiny. He said that chance ruled all things. I had no anger against him, even when I became aware that he had been following me up and dogging my footsteps with the price of blood in his pocket. Had he not sought to ally murder to his other wrong he would be

alive to-day!" Speaking with something of his old manner, but with that manner toned down in subjection to the calmness with which he looked forward to the future, he walks the room. Following him with his eye, the detective gazes at him with a look of doubt gradually spreading over his face. Then he speaks to him again.

"The Frenchman was not the only one who followed you. There was another man who saw it all. He is before the coroner now. His testimony, they say,—I have not heard what it will be—, will clear up every doubt connected with the death of Mr. Arncliffe and the Frenchman. That man's testimony will either clear you or convict you. I hope it may do the former."

"Another man, you say? What other man?"

"The tobacconist over the way there;" and the detective, with his thumb, indicates Mr. Creech's shop. "He saw the Frenchman watching this house and saw you come up and go away. And then, when the Frenchman went after you, he followed both of you."

"Why did he follow—did he say?"

"He gave no reason. He had no reason to give. He could not help it, he said."

"It was he, then, whom I overtook on the common and whom I heard running along the street."

When Captain Vernon has said this, he gazes into the fire for a little while with his thoughtful look. He is thinking of how much the tobacconist had witnessed of the events of that night. Looking up a moment after, he speaks to the detective.

"When did you come from Calcutta, Masters?"

"About two weeks ago. We seem fated to meet again. As I said before, Captain, it is a hard necessity; but a man must do his duty, you know. It is a grave charge, and with only one man's testimony between you

and death—even if you should escape conviction on the old charge.”

“I know the penalty of conviction. You need not speak of it. I have expected this visit. I had no desire to escape it, Masters. I have no wish to avoid the scrutiny of the law.”

“Have you any preparation to make before you go? You can have the time if you wish it. Of course, my claim upon you is prior to the other.”

“Yes; I would require an hour or two before I go. I desire to send for some one, and I would wish you to delay until that person shall come. When I shall have seen that person I shall be ready to go with you. I can have that time, I suppose?”

“Yes, Captain, I can give you that time. I only wish I could grant you more than that.”

“Your arrest of me, I presume, is based on the old charge?”

“On the old charge. Limerick, the London detective, has the warrant for your arrest on the present charge.”

“Where is he?”

“Attending the examination before the coroner.”

“Very well. What o’clock is it now?” The detective looks at his watch.

“Seven o’clock.”

“Then give me till ten.”

He lights a candle, sits at the table, and commences to write. The detective is standing near the door speaking to one of the policemen. After a minute’s conversation he addresses Captain Vernon.

“My duty is not to leave you, Captain; but I yield to your request, trusting that everything is on the square.”

“I have passed my word, Masters, that I will be ready for

you in three hours' time. You need not fear that I shall attempt to escape. You can leave the door open if you like."

"Your promise not to attempt an escape is sufficient," returns the detective. And then he goes out of the room, leaving Captain Vernon writing.

In the short interval that elapsed before Captain Vernon opened the door with a note in his hand, the detective, although confiding in Captain Vernon's promise that he would not seek to escape, considered it his duty to send one of the policemen below to watch the front of the house. He also made Blacker, seated in his room and weeping in his anguish, aware of the nature of the charge against Captain Vernon, or Arthur Tyrrel, which he had called "the old charge." And this charge involved the fact that the man who called himself Captain Horace Vernon, late of her Majesty's service, was a fugitive from justice with an accusation of murder laid to his account.

Thus, then, was the old mystery solved; but in solving it, what greater and darker crime had come to light! Weeping in the sombre gloom of the old house, Blacker read the whole story of Captain Vernon's conduct since his return to Alderley; the attempt to secure influence; the strange involvement between him and Monsieur Raphael! But in that making clear of what was a mystery before came the terrible revelation of his supposed complicity in another murderous crime! Weeping in that dark hour, his sympathy still went out to the suspected man. In all his vices; in all his follies; in all his heartless calculations; he had still loved him. Still loved him in spite of the wrong which he had made him—the old man—commit; the wrong that was buried in the past and which yet remained unatoned for.

The sound of Captain Vernon's door opening, and the

Captain's voice calling him to him, brought Blacker to his feet. The old man sought him, standing upon the threshold of his room, with the tears still in his eyes.

"This is a bad ending, Arthur," he said; "a worse ending than I ever thought of before."

"Never dwell upon that now, Blacker. Let what is past remain with the past. We must think of the future now. Here is a note for Mrs. Arneliffe—for Bertha. Have it taken to her immediately. You had better go yourself. I had wished you to remain here with me; but as, for her sake, secrecy is desirable, you had better go."

As he spoke he handed the note to the old man and closed the door hastily.

Blacker stood irresolutely for a moment. Wondering at that utter forgetfulness of danger which characterized Captain Vernon's manner, he reflected within himself whether he were indeed innocent of a criminal shedding of blood, and whether his sense of that innocence upheld him in his hour of peril. Then his mind reverted to the note that Captain Vernon had given him and to its purpose. That purpose, he knew, was to make known that which had been so long concealed, and was to bring with it the accomplishment of the hopes for so many years indulged in, and with it, too, forgiveness for the past.

Going noiselessly down the stairs, the old man went into the street upon his mission. The premonitory evidences of a gathering multitude met his eye in the appearance of a small knot of eager talkers standing around the policeman on the pavement and looking up at Captain Vernon's window. The rumor of the arrest was abroad, he thought, as he walked away.

And then for an hour there was silence in the old house broken only by the creaking of the detective's shoes as he walked back and forth in Blacker's room conversing with

a comrade, sitting by the fire, of Captain Vernon. Only that, and the sound of a low moaning from the upper stairs, where, in the darkness, unnoticed and unthought of, Mary Agnes, prone upon the floor and with her white face held between her hands, was weeping over the ruin of that one golden fabric which had made enchantment of her haunted life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT MR. CREECH HEARD AND SAW AT THE BARON'S GRAVE.

WHEN Mr. Creech, accompanied by Limerick, the detective, made his appearance before the coroner, he did so with the old fear upon him of becoming involved in the Balfour-street mystery intensified into a dreadful horror. His first performance, after dropping into a chair, was to ask for water. When that was given him, and when he had wet his parched throat and lips, he stared around him with an anxious look. His gaze fell upon the coroner and the magistrates seated at the table, with pens and paper before them, with the air of executioners, and thereafter, with a sudden shudder, upon the motionless object in the corner, bearing the human shape and covered with the piece of faded carpet.

Upon the right of the local ministers of the law, Sir John Eden sat with a depressed look upon his face. His mind was dwelling upon the serious accusation brought against Captain Vernon and on the fact of his being a fugitive from a similar charge. And he was thinking, too, of how far the responsibility of what had occurred devolved upon him in having allowed himself to be the agent of the Captain's presentation to Mrs. Arncliffe. In common with the other magistrates he cherished a lingering hope that some palliating circumstances might be connected with Captain Vernon's presumed share in the tragedy.

But with the testimony afforded by the statements of the detectives; the testimony that directly implicated Captain Vernon with the unknown man found dead with Mr. Arncliffe; he and they were forced to the conviction, in common with the detective who had apprehended Captain Vernon, that the appearance of affairs was against the prisoner.

The entrance of Mr. Creech interrupted the conversation between Sir John and the magistrates. When the tobacconist had taken his seat—with the staring look about him—the coroner said, "Is this the prisoner; is this Captain Vernon, as he calls himself, Mr. Limerick?" Sir John, casting his look in the direction of the unhappy tobacconist, smiled in despite of the serious business before them at the contrast between that dejected little man and the subject of the coroner's remark. The detective, bending a little forward, made the coroner aware of Mr. Creech's identity.

"Ah! a witness? Pray, where did you find him, and how, Mr. Limerick?" asked Mr. Jarvie, when the detective had given him the information.

"By accident, sir. I discovered that he had been in the habit of watching this Captain Vernon. He lives on the same street, opposite Captain Vernon's house. When I spoke to him concerning the Captain's movements on last night, he confessed to me that he knew all about them; that he had followed him and had seen the whole affair as it occurred."

"This is very singular! Why did you not appear at the inquest this morning and give your testimony?" asked the coroner sternly of Mr. Creech. Mr. Jarvie could be fierce enough away from the presence of the man whom we all deplore.

"I don't know, your Worship! I suppose because I was

frightened!" returned the tobacconist, looking uneasily at his questioner.

"Frightened! What! had you been threatened?"

"Oh, no! Nobody knew that I saw it. I never mentioned it to a soul. I—I was afraid!" The glass of water was near his hand, and he again refreshed himself with its contents, and then passed his tongue over his lips to moisten them.

"And you were going to allow this terrible mystery to remain in darkness without uttering a single word to clear it up?" continued Mr. Jarvie, looking around at his colleagues with an expression of profound astonishment upon his face.

Mr. Creech again sipped at the water before replying. "No," he said finally, with a choke. "If anybody would ha' had to swing for it, I'd ha' come out and told about it. I hope, your Worships, you won't be too hard on me. Consider, your Worships. Here was I—" He paused as he observed that the magistrates were engaged in earnest conversation and were not noticing him. Then he tried the detective, speaking in a confidential whisper, and leaning over toward him, "Here was I, sir, you see—"; but observing that the officer walked up and down the room, paying no attention to him, he consulted, first the glass of water, then his hat lying in his lap, and, finally, the faces of the whispering speakers. But as no consolation could be drawn from any of these, his gaze, resting for an instant upon the hidden figure in the corner, went out of the window through which the shadows of night were entering; and in a little while he had almost forgotten the presence in which he sat, as his memory, put into action by the gathering gloom without, recalled the long, dreary walk of the night before, the cautious pursuit and the bloody ending.

Mr. Creech, looking out of the window abstractedly with that scared expression in his eye; thinking of Captain Vernon and of the measure of his own guilt in having witnessed the occurrences at the Baron's Grave; was recalled to himself by a question from Sir John Eden. One of the magistrates, with pen in hand, looked at the tobacconist over his spectacles pending the question.

"We are to understand," said the baronet, "that you witnessed the death of Mr. Arncliffe and of the man who was found near Mr. Arncliffe?"

Gazing furtively from Sir John to the holder of the pen, and from the holder of the pen to the object which the carpet concealed, Mr. Creech replied, "Yes, your Worships, I saw it all." The pen having recorded the question and the answer, and the eyes having been again, much to the tobacconist's discomfort, turned upon him over the spectacles, Sir John went on.

"Your name"—consulting a paper handed him at that moment by the detective—"your name is Creech, I believe."

"*Thomas Creech*," returned the tobacconist with an air of apologizing for the "*Thomas*." "*Thomas Creech, sir, tobacconist.*" Mr. Creech stopped in his breathing for a moment to watch, with open mouth, the movements of the pen as that fact was also recorded. When his announcement had finally been noted down, and when the disconcerting eyes were again fixed upon him, he drew a long breath and stared at the baronet.

Sir John's next movement was to whisper to the magistrates. After a short consultation, Mr. Creech was ordered to stand up. Then the oath was administered to him, to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in the statement that he was about to make and in the evidence that he was about to give.

With the memory of his oath upon him, Mr. Creech was led up to the corner. He stood there with a blanched face and looked upon the motionless figure while the carpet was slowly dragged from it.

"Stand out of the witness's light," said Mr. Jarvie. "Look upon this body, witness. Can you identify it?"

"To the best of my belief, I can, your Worship. To the best of my belief this is him as come a-creeping up last night and stood by the Chinee in front of my own door a-watching of Captain Vernon's house. This is the man as follered Captain Vernon and this is the man as I follered. This here party, your Worship, was the one as stabbed Captain Vernon and afterwards broke away from him and fell into the Baron's Grave."

"You feel certain that this is the body of the man whom you describe?"

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, this is the man," replied Mr. Creech, in a low and cautious tone. Then he added, "Was there a cloak found with him?"

The cloak which had wrapped the body around was held up for the tobacconist's inspection. As, once before, it had served to satisfy Mr. Creech of its wearer's identity so now it resolved his mind.

"I can swear t^o that cloak, your Worship. This is the man."

When Mr. Creech had made this answer, the carpet, at a motion from the coroner, was replaced, and the pale visage of what had once been Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, from Paris, was shut out from the inquiring eyes that had inspected it.

"In order to save time," said Sir John, when the tobacconist had seated himself preparatory to continuing his testimony, "you will make your statement in your own way, Mr. Creech. You will take care to narrate

everything that you know concerning the killing, and to avoid, as far as possible, whatever is disconnected from the case. You are upon your oath, remember. The life of a fellow-man may depend upon your answers, but you must not forget that justice is to be satisfied in the statement you may make. Now, sir, proceed—and slowly, so that what you have to say may be taken down.”

“Well,” commenced Mr. Creech, preparing himself by moistening his lips with a draught of water, “how I come to foller Captain Vernon and the other one—”

“The man whom you have just identified?” interrupted one of the magistrates.

“Yes, your Worship. As far as I could judge he *was* the man I follered. How I come to foller them was this. I, sitting at my winder opposite, and watching of Captain Vernon’s house—if you ask me why I was sitting there and watching it, I’d say I had no particular reason, I’d say I was in the habit of looking out for him, I’d say why I was looking out for him was because he had gone away the evening before and I was wondering what he was up to and when he’d come back.” Here the witness paused to wipe his face with his handkerchief, and to say, “Where was I, your Worships?”

“You were sitting at your window watching Captain Vernon’s house.”

“Oh! so I was, your Worships! Sitting at my winder about half-past six o’clock on the night when it occurred, I see a man—a small man, your Worships, a small slim man, the man in the corner there—a-coming on the street, quiet-like, and wrapped up in a cloak. What with the cloak and what with the man’s way—his way being the way of a cat—I says to myself, says I, ‘I see that man and I see that cloak afore.’ Then I look closer. Then I says to myself, ‘Where I see that cloak and where I see that man was not

many nights ago, late, in Captain Vernon's room.' That's what made me watch him when he come up, because when he went away that same night I'm telling you of, your Worships, he left very late and very mysterious in his way."

Mr. Creech moistened his lips with his tongue and swallowed before proceeding.

"When I see the man come up in that sly way," he went on, "I think, what's up? What, as connected with Captain Vernon, 's up? I see him cross over the street when he had reached the house and stand near my door by the side of the Chinees there. Then I see him look at Captain Vernon's winder, where there was a light a-burning—but a low light like the light of a fire. He thought he was there, perhaps; perhaps he didn't; but there he stood a-watching of the winder, and there I sat a-watching of him. He might have been there ten minutes when he lit a match and commenced to smoke. He commenced to smoke a cigarette. Then I knew, what I wasn't certain of afore, that he was a foreigner."

At this juncture Mr. Creech strengthened himself with another pull at the glass of water and went on with his narrative.

"Watching him, I thinks to myself, you'll have a time a-waiting, my friend, whoever you are, if you're a-waiting for Captain Vernon. I knew that the Captain had gone away the day before with you, your Worship"—to Sir John—"and I knew that he hadn't returned. After a while I hear a sound of coming footsteps on the pavement, maybe a square away. It was a quiet night, and those footsteps were the first I hear since the man come up and commenced to watch the house. I see the man beneath my winder bending to look from behind the Chinees at who was a-coming. When I see him do that I bend in the winder—so,

your Worships,"—illustrating his meaning by leaning as far to one side in his chair as was consistent with the preservation of his balance,—“and then who should I see a-coming on the street but Captain Vernon a-walking as if something was follering of him and he was making haste to get out of its reach.”

“Apparently excited?” questioned Mr. Jarvie.

“Apparently, your Worships, very much excited. Apparently, your Worships, very angry about something. Apparently, what I'd call tremendously excited.”

“Well?”

“Well! When we both bend for'ard to watch him a-coming on the street—me and the man below—I see him with his hand held over his head and shaking it like. Then the man with the cloak throws his cigarette on the pavement and stamps it out. We—me and the man standing near the Chinees—both watch to see him go into the house. What I thinks to myself when I see the other one—”

“The man on the pavement under your window?”

“Yes, your Worship. When I see the other one—why I call him *that* is, because Mr. Arncliffe, *he* was one, and the man I'm talking about was the other one, as was found—when I see him a-stamping his cigarette out, I says to myself, says I, *you* don't want to be seen, my friend; that's what *you're* up to. Then I turn to look at Captain Vernon. I see him standing at his door for a little while and then I see him walk back the same way he had come, still shaking his hand and tossing his head and with that way about him of being follered up.”

Sipping at the water, crossing his leg from left to right and then from right to left, staring at his listeners with that same furtive look, wiping his face with his handkerchief and moistening his dry lips with his dry tongue, Mr. Creech, in the time consumed in these actions, paused, and then went on.

"Your Worships! If I was to tell you now that when Captain Vernon went off in that way of being follered, the other one, *he* crept after him like his shadder, I'd be a-telling of you gospel! Like his shadder, your Worships! Like his shadder a-creeping on his toes! When I see that—when I see Captain Vernon walking away and the other one a-going after him—I says to myself, says I, 'I'd like to know what's up! I'd like to know why the other one's a-follering of Captain Vernon in that sort of style! I'd like to know what he's up to to-night!' When I say that to myself, I go down stairs and open the door and walk into the street. I lock the door behind me, and then I fol-ler after them."

"You had no purpose beyond curiosity in following?"

"No purpose, your Worship! None! *You* call it curiosity. I call it something that I couldn't help, your Worships!"

"Well?"

"Well! When I reach the street, Captain Vernon and the other one was gone. Captain Vernon, he was in the next square, walking away rapidly; the other one, *he* wasn't far behind him. I could hear Captain Vernon's footsteps, but I couldn't hear the footsteps of the other one. For why? I told you before, your Worships, he was a-walking on his toes! I'm on my oath now, your Worships, and I'm a-telling you the truth. I, follering of the other one—I walk on my toes, too. That's the way we went, your Worships, through the streets till we reached the Lunnun road."

"Go on. What more?"

"Your Worships! I'm a-telling you, as near as I can get to it, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I was frightened. It was a misty night and a cold night, and the wind was a-blowing across the common. I

couldn't see Captain Vernon after he'd got away from the lamps of the town and I could only keep the other one in sight by keeping close to *him*. I knew, though, which way Captain Vernon was a-going by the track of the other one. We went in that way along the road. I see ahead of me, when near the Hall, maybe a hundred yards, a light coming out of the gate-keeper's lodge and falling on the hedge. Then I see Captain Vernon come into the light and stop there for a while and look in. When he stopped I knew the other one, though I didn't clearly see him, had stopped likewise. So I stop and wait. Close to the hedge, your Worships, bending down in this way, I stop and wait."

Again, in token of the manner in which he had bent down on that occasion, Mr. Creech cowered in his chair, assuming, for an instant, the figure of a misshapen dwarf.

"Watching Captain Vernon standing with the light from the winder a-falling on him," he resumed, "I see him go off suddenly like as if he was shot out of a gun. I see him come out of the light back on the road and toward me and the other one. Then I get back farther in the shadow of the hedge until he had passed. In about a half a minute, I a-waiting for him, I see the other one a-creeping along the road after Captain Vernon. Then I come into the road myself and foller after."

"When Captain Vernon passèd you, did you notice that excited manner in him?"

"No, your Worships, and that struck me as strange. He seemed to have walked his passion off. He was going along the road, swift but quiet in his way. A-looking, as near as I could judge, straight ahead of him. Follering of the other one, and when opposite the road branching off to the Baron's Grave, I see him turn into that road. Into that road, then, your Worships, I turn too. When we had gone about a quarter of a mile, more or less, I see the other

one stop short, and get into the shadow of the hedge. I do the same and then I wait again."

At a motion from Mr. Creech, the detective replenished his empty glass. When that was done Mr. Creech drank of the water, ran his tongue over his lips, swallowed, and resumed where he had left off.

"I wait there, maybe ten minutes. I think, waiting there, that I hear Captain Vernon a-talking to hisself. I hear something like a voice—one voice as if talking alone. Howsomever, your Worships, I keep my eye on the other one, or on the place where he disappeared again the hedge. I watch that place so, your Worships."

Fixing his eye upon a far corner of the room—but not the corner wherein lay the silent figure—in testimony of the manner in which he had watched the spot of the other one's disappearance, Mr. Creech became rigid for an instant with a stony and unnatural stare.

"Suddenly, your Worships," he continued, bringing his eye slowly around toward the officers of the law, "I hear the sound of talking cease. Then I see the other one, coming out of the shadow of the hedge like a ghost—like a small ghost, your Worships, to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, wrapped up in a cloak—and creeping away along the road as before. Then I foller once more. I come to a stile over the hedge which, a little while before, I see the other one stand for a moment like a ghost again the sky atop of it. I cross that stile and get into the common. The common was dark and it was hard to see the other one. But I hurry up and trace him, almost on his heels. Keeping close to him I see him turn to the right and cross another stile and get into the road again. Then I foller him for a hundred yards or so until, your Worships, we reach the Baron's Grave."

With the recollection of that time upon him, Mr. Creech's

hue became of a whiter character, his lips of a dryer condition, his manner of speaking more mysterious. The profound attention with which his statement was received tended, also, to disturb his nerves, and he continued his narrative with uneasy glances at his listeners and with a slow measurement of his words.

"The first thing I see, your Worships, when we reach the bridge, was to see the other one get in among the old logs and planks lying on the side of the road. The remains of the old wooden bridge, your Worships. Then I creep up and get behind another lot of planks on the other side of the road and reach the farthest end. From that place I see Captain Vernon. From that place I see, sitting on his horse near the bridge, motionless, Mr. Arncliffe. They—Captain Vernon and Mr. Arncliffe—had been talking before I got up. What was said I don't know; but they had been talking. Then I bend down under the planks with my head out, look out, and listen. The first thing I hear when I commence to listen was to hear Mr. Arncliffe say to Captain Vernon, 'Have I ever met you before, sir?' and to hear Captain Vernon answer, 'Never, sir.' Then Mr. Arncliffe, he says, 'Ah?' and straightens himself on his horse like."

"You speak of Mr. Arncliffe as sitting on his horse near the bridge," said one of the magistrates. "How near was that to the edge of the precipice?"

"Mr. Arncliffe, he was about six feet, as near as I could judge, from the side of the pit. Captain Vernon, he was standing near the horse's head toward me, like."

"Very well. Describe what occurred afterward."

"When Mr. Arncliffe straightened himself upon his horse, proud like, he went on to say that, if Captain Vernon wanted to speak with him, he would listen to him, although where he was then wasn't the place he'd choose to talk

with a gentleman on business. Which Captain Vernon said to that, that he knew it, and that he was a petitioner—or a word like that—and he must accept circumstances as he found them. Which Mr. Arncliffe, he said then, ‘Now, sir, to your business.’”

The tobacconist, when he had reached this point, looked down at his hat meditatively, and with an air of seeking to remember what had followed. Then he gazed for a little while suspiciously at the rapid pen transcribing his statement, and finally, when the pen had ceased its movements, proceeded with what he had to say.

“When Mr. Arncliffe, he told Captain Vernon to proceed with his business, as I said before, Captain Vernon, he remarked, ‘Before I commence, Mr. Arncliffe, with what I have to tell you, let me say to you that I have the honor of an acquaintance with Mrs. Arncliffe and that I have been a visitor at Framleigh-Place. I do not tell you this, hoping it may be of avail in what I am about to ask you, but because I consider it your right to know this, and because I think it proper that you should know it.’ Then Mr. Arncliffe, he says, ‘Well, sir?’ He says that in a proud way. Captain Vernon goes on, ‘What I have to ask of you, Mr. Arncliffe, is a exercise of your influence in my behalf. I came here to Alderley a month ago hunted down. I’m a-hunted down now’—I’m a-giving you the words exact, your Worships—‘and you can save me if you will exert that influence.’ ‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ says Mr. Arncliffe, or using words to that effect, which I was a-paying more attention to what Captain Vernon had to say, your Worships—‘I beg your pardou, sir,’ says he, ‘but I don’t understand you.’ Then Captain Vernon commences in a fierce way, ‘If a man has been a reckless’—I think that was the word, your Worships—‘man in his day,’ says he, ‘and if he has committed errors, that is no reason why he

shouldn't be permitted to reform, sir.' 'No, sir,' says Mr. Arncliffe, meaning, I suppose, as it was only the fair thing to give a man a chance, and—"

"Never mind your suppositions. Give us the conversation as you remember it," interrupted Sir John.

"I beg your pardon, your Worship. When Mr. Arncliffe said 'no, sir,' Captain Vernon, he says, 'Then, Mr. Arncliffe, when I sought—as I did seek—to reform, and when I met sneers and taunts'—I ain't so sure about the 'sneers,' but I can swear to the 'taunts,' your Worships—'for what I had been, I was justified in resenting,' says he, 'the insults as knaves and fools heaped upon me—wasn't I, sir?' Which Mr. Arncliffe said he was the best judge of that himself, and that if his conscience justified him, 'why,' says he, 'do you ask me?' Then Captain Vernon, he said, 'My conscience did justify me, but the world did not. Listen, Mr. Arncliffe, while I tell you of how I was treated.' Says Mr. Arncliffe, says he, 'Go on, sir, I am a-listening.' 'I was insulted,' says Captain Vernon, 'in the regiment to which I was attached, by a superior officer. I resented the insult on the spot,' says he, 'and challenged the officer who insulted me.' Mr. Arncliffe, he says, 'You committed a breach of'—of something or other, your Worships—"

"Discipline?"

"That's the word as he used! 'You committed a breach of discipline,' says he, 'and for this you were doubtless punished.' 'I was punished,' answers Captain Vernon. 'But for why? Because the officers as sat upon the court-martial that tried me hated me. I was cashiered and driven from the service.' When he said that, Mr. Arncliffe remarked that he had oughter known his duties better and wanted to know if he wished his influence to get put back again into the service. Which Captain Vernon answered,

'No, Mr. Arncliffe. It wasn't for that, but for what fol-
lered that. When I was driven from the service,' says he,
'my old disgrace follered me. Men whom I despised felt
as I was their equal because I *had* been disgraced.'
Then he went on to say that he had sought to reform.
But, he said, it was all in vain. Men remembered his dis-
grace, and some thought that because he had become
milder in his ways he was cowed by what had been put up-
on him. There was one man, he said, as tried to raise
a laugh again him for his dismissal from his regiment.
That man sneered at him in a crowded room in Calcutta,
and he struck him down, with one blow, at his feet—killed
him, your Worships. Mr. Arncliffe remarked as that was
murder. Which Captain Vernon then replied, that society
and the law said the same thing, and what he was there at
the Baron's Grave that night for was to see Mr. Arncliffe
and to ask him to use his influence and get the dishonor
taken off of him—he being a fugitive at that blessed mo-
ment from the law with a reward offered for his ar-
rest."

Sir John, looking at Mr. Creech intently, caught the lat-
ter's eye for a moment, nodded to him once or twice and
said, "Go on. We are listening."

"When Captain Vernon said that he was a fugitive with
a price on his head, Mr. Arncliffe, he straightened hisself up
as straight as a arrow, your Worships, and says, 'I cannot
assist you. Whatever sympathy I might ha' had for you,
you have made useless by daring to cross my threshold and
by lifting your eyes to the face of my wife. They at least,'
he says, your Worships, a-straightening of hisself more and
more till he looked more like a stature astride the horse
than a living man, 'they at least, sir,' says he, 'should have
been spared your presence.' Then Captain Vernon says,
'Have a care, Mr. Arncliffe, and don't anger me. Have a

care how you add to the wrongs the world has heaped upon me. I told you of my disgrace, trusting that you would assist me. I humbled myself,' he says, 'in making of that confession, and you give me a dog's answer. Is this honorable, is this manly, Mr. Arncliffe?' says he. 'You have my answer,' Mr. Arncliffe says; 'such as it is, you have my answer. I will not betray you. I will not turn informer upon you; but I warn you that you cross the threshold of Framleigh at your peril—not the peril of the law but the peril arising from my personal intervention. Now, sir,' he says, 'let me pass!' With that he turns his horse's head toward the road, but Captain Vernon holds on to the bridle and says, with a scornful laugh, that he *must* listen to him. What with Captain Vernon's holding on to the horse and Mr. Arncliffe's urging of the horse for'ard—for Mr. Arncliffe was a telling of Captain Vernon to let go or he'd cut him with the whip—the horse gets scared and commences to pull back on his hind-feet. Then Captain Vernon, holding on to the rein, told Mr. Arncliffe to jump from the saddle, as he couldn't hold the horse and it would be death if the horse went back'ard to the edge. But Mr. Arncliffe keeps on whipping of the horse for'ard, which Captain Vernon was a-pulling of his bridle at the same time. Then, your Worships, of a sudden I hear something like a snap and a cry, and I see Captain Vernon come a-reeling toward me again the planks. He falls again them so close to me that I can see the bit of bridle in his hand. I says to myself, says I, 'It's all up with Mr. Arncliffe. Mr. Arncliffe has gone over the edge of the pit!'

"You saw what you have described, and heard what you have repeated, clearly, Mr. Creech? There was no other struggle on the edge of the Baron's Grave?" questioned the baronet.

"No struggle, your Worship, but that struggle to drag

the horse from the danger. It was like a flash. Here was Mr. Arncliffe a-trying to urge the horse for'ard, which the horse at that time was a-rearing up on his hind-feet, and Captain Vernon a-trying to pull him back—out of the danger, it seemed to me, judging from his words to Mr. Arncliffe when he told him to jump off. In a single instant, your Worships, I see the horse and rider disappear, and just then Captain Vernon he come a-staggering back, like he was knocked down, with the piece of rein in his hand. That's what I see, your Worships, and that's what I'm on my oath to tell!"

Here the magistrates held a brief consultation. There was an apparent lighting up of their faces as if a great burden had been removed from their hearts. Then they settled themselves in their seats again, and nodded to the tobacconist to go on.

"Your Worships! When I see what had happened to Mr. Arncliffe I think for the first time of the other one. I think, too, of myself. I was that scared that I could hardly creep along the planks to get into the common and to run back to Alderley. I creep away and leave Captain Vernon standing in the road like a stature. I creep away and cross the road and get into the shadder of the hedge, wondering what's become of the other one. When I get near the hedge, I look over my shoulder behind me and I see him about ten feet off, bending down in the dust and trying, I think, to decide which way was Alderley. I should judge from the other one's ways,—which I think I already said was the ways of a cat, that he had never been there before and didn't much know which was which. Then of a sudden I hear a loud cry, something like a word in French, and I look closer from the hedge. I see Captain Vernon come up suddenly like a shadder and jump at the other one. The other one he hollers to Captain Vernon to let him go.

Captain Vernon he lifts him up and keeps a-holt of him by the collar. 'Musha Raphael,' I hear him say, 'what brings you here? Why did you foller me, Musha Raphael?' Then the other one he swears in French, and hollers again for Captain Vernon to let him go. It is so dark where I am that I can creep up opposite them. I creep up so, your Worships."

In his explanatory way the tobacconist follows the wall of the room crouchingly for a few feet, and then returns to his seat.

"I creep up in that way," he resumes, "until I get opposite them. Then I hear Captain Vernon say, 'Musha Raphael, I know you have betrayed me, but why did you foller me? Were you follering of your destiny, Musha Raphael, or was it chance as led you here?' He was still a-holding of the other one by the collar—the other one at the time having his back to the bridge. Looking at them, and just as Captain Vernon gets through speaking, I see the other one's hand fly up in the air and I see likewise something shine like as if it might be a knife. I see him bring his hand down on Captain Vernon, and then I see him break away from the Captain's holt, running toward the pit. I lose sight of him as he jumps into the field, and then I hear a loud cry of 'Murder!' come from him and I know *he's* gone over too, your Worships!"

"You feel positive that Saint Elme held a knife in his hand?" asked Sir John Eden.

"Positive. For why? I see it a-shining like, with a dull shine, your Worships, when he lifts his arm up and brings it down again like a flash."

"Was Captain Vernon's manner threatening at the moment he was holding the Frenchman and speaking to him?"

"I couldn't well describe his manner, your Worships

I wouldn't ha' called it threatening. He seemed to be talking more to hisself than to the other one. I should judge, your Worships, from the way he spoke, that he was not surprised to catch the other one up to follering of him. Leastways, that was how it seemed to me."

"When the Frenchman broke away what did Captain Vernon do? Did he follow him?"

"No, your Worships. He stood there like as if he was struck of a heap. It seemed to me as if the cry of 'murder', a-coming back, had struck him and staggered him. That's how it appeared to me, your Worships."

"What was Captain Vernon's next movement?"

"I left him standing there while I went along the hedge. I left him there and got into the road and made off for Alderley. I think he must have come after me pretty quick, because why, when I get about five hundred yards down the road I see something come out of the field and cross the road, and I hear it call to me to stop. But I don't stop, your Worships. I keep on a-running; for what with the lanterns as was all around us, which the other one's cry had brought them out, and what with the fear I have of being took up for a guilty party, I think to myself, thinks I, that if I can reach my shop, your Worships, I'll be better off than out in that 'ere dark common, with such work going on around me as I had just looked at!"

Drinking, for the twentieth time, of the water at his side, the witness to the horrors of the night previous again passed his tongue over his lips and swallowed with a painful effort. He wiped his face with his handkerchief once more; and watched the gliding pen, and glanced from face to face with the same furtive look, as if doubtful of the verdict. Then he crossed and recrossed his leg, first the right and then the left, fumbled anxiously with his hat, looked into that article of wearing apparel, apparently for

consolation, found none there, fixed his eye upon the representatives of the law, and waited.

While Mr. Creech waited the magistrates took counsel. The detective, standing at a respectful distance from them, seemed, in a different way however, to be waiting also. In this condition of taking counsel and of waiting the minutes passed on until the council was over.

No cross-examination; no skilful framing of questions, having for their purpose the possible inveiglement of Mr. Creech into a maze of uncertainty; no suggestion of a possible misunderstanding on his part of what had truly occurred in that fatal interview at the Baron's Grave, could shake the tobacconist's testimony or could serve to present the measure of Captain Vernon's responsibility in a different light from that which had been given it by the evidence of this single witness. Clearly innocent of crime; clearly the victim of a most extraordinary evil chance; clearly a man who would have expiated his misfortunes in an unrighteous death, but for the miraculous intervention, in that dire moment of calamity, which had enabled him who had devoted his days to watching him to testify in his behalf, Captain Vernon passed from the shadow of suspicion, as the pedler had passed from the shadow of suspicion before him; and the mystery of the Baron's Grave, anticipatorily explained by the rapid writers for the world's information, became a mystery no more.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAPTAIN VERNON MAKES REPARATION AND SOLVES THE
LAST MYSTERY CONNECTED WITH THE HOUSE IN BAL-
FOUR-STREET.

IN her bridal chamber—sacred now to the memory of the dead—Mrs. Arncliffe dwelt upon what had transpired in the last three days and sought, in her blind desolation, to read the future. She thought of that strange chance that had led her to Eden Lodge and of the stranger chance that had brought Captain Vernon there to avow his fatal love to her. And then her mind rested upon Mr. Arncliffe's return and upon the dark tragedy that had found its completion in the night-shadows of the Baron's Grave. What had brought Mr. Arncliffe home so suddenly? she thought. Her mind went out in vague surmises, but always to come to one conclusion—that the only lips which might have spoken were silent in death.

The events of these terrible days were to her but as portions of a hideous dream. The memory of that love which had owed its birth to a miserable chance; which had brought with it tears and agony; which had culminated, as she believed, in crime; came to harass her in her affliction and to add its strength of sorrow to the sorrow for her great loss. For, however failing in the love she should have given him, she had always honored and respected Mr. Arncliffe. And, amid her tears, she thought of him as dead and as dying in ignorance of the fidelity with which, in crushing the passionate instincts of her heart, she had

proven herself worthy of the trust he had confided to her keeping.

A knock at the door interrupted her meditations. It was doubtless her maid come to light the room. Mrs. Arncliffe had instructed her, when the night had come on, to attend her in an hour; and so she called to the knocker to come in.

The door opened and Susan entered. "Here is a note, ma'am, that has just been brought. The gentleman who brought it is below," said the maid.

Mrs. Arncliffe looked up and received the note from Susan's hand. It was addressed to Mrs. Arncliffe, Framleigh-Place, and the bold and arrogant sweep of the writing made her half guess the source whence it had come. She broke the seal and read these words:

"I *must* see you. I am in the hands of the law and cannot come to you. I am hunted down on two charges—murder and evasion of trial for an old offence. If you are as generous as the world gives you credit for being, come to me before it is too late. I am innocent of a wilful shedding of blood. Come to me and let me make reparation to you for what I have done to your detriment. The bearer of this note, the friend who lives with me, will accompany you. Notwithstanding what has passed, you cannot refuse this last request that I shall ever make.

"VERNON.

"No. 40, Balfour-street."

Few as these words were, they sufficed to send the blood to her heart and to cover her face with a whiteness greater than had been there before. In the brief moment that elapsed between the reading of the note and her struggling recovery from the shock that Captain Vernon's written

words had given her, she had made her resolve. And that resolve was to go to him immediately. To go to him in this hour, the darkest of his life, and to fill the place of that mother who, had she been alive, would have blessed him in his unhappiness. In that resolve she had no care for the opinion of the world. It was enough to know that the world had turned from *him* and that he was hopeless and friendless. There was no bond to hold her away from him now. She was free to go to him now and pray for him.

She spoke to the maid, standing behind her chair. "Where is Lady Eden?"

"Lady Eden is in her room, ma'am."

"Very well, Susan. You can go now. When I need you I will ring for you. You need not come until you hear the bell. Is that gentleman still below?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then take this note to him." She wrote a few lines hastily and gave them to the maid—a simple announcement to Blacker that he need not wait for her and that she would follow him directly.

When Susan had departed with this message, Mrs. Arncliffe went to the landing and stood for a moment listening near the door of her room. When she heard the front door close upon Captain Vernon's messenger and, immediately thereafter, caught the sound of the footsteps of Susan and the Victim as they sought the servant's quarters, she returned to her own room.

Throwing a dark hooded cloak over her darker widow's weeds, she went once more into the passage, locking the door of her room behind her. The lamp, hanging from the ceiling, cast a cheerful radiance over the carpeted floor. There was no one there to observe her. There was no one up stairs or down stairs to listen to her. The servants were in their rooms and her maid would not come to her

until she should hear the ringing of the bell. She had no fear that any of the household of Framleigh, on this cold night, would be wandering through the lonely house. This, then, was her opportunity to go forth, alone and unsuspected, to the side of the man who had asked her to come to him in his sore trial—to go to him, and learn the truth from him, and to pray for him as his mother would have prayed.

Standing at the head of the stairway she listens. Lady Eden, her companion in these melancholy days, is in her room. Below, in the parlor, with that tremendous presence of death about them, sit my Lord and another special friend of Mr. Arncliffe's, staring into the fire, judging the dead man as Society had judged him, and watching for that possible resurrection which shall never come. She goes down the stairway, her footfall muffled in the carpet. In the great hall she looks about her. Another lamp throws its tinted light through crimson glasses upon the portals of the giant door and on the cushioned chairs with gothic backs whereon the Stately Martyr and the Gorgeous Victim are wont to loll, awaiting the calls of Society. But she does not pass these. She has no thought of opening the front door with the chances of detection which may come with the loud resounding echoes in its closing. Turning at the foot of the stairway, she follows the course of the hall in the opposite direction until she reaches a small door which leads, by winding stairs, into the yard. This door she opens quietly, and then goes down, to find herself outside of the house, and with the cold wind blowing upon her cheeks and chilling her through the heavy cloak.

Down the avenue, on the gravelled road and through the side gate near the lodge, she walks. The gate-keeper hears no intimation of her departure as she lifts the latch and steps into the high-road which leads to Alderley. The

dreary wind blows upon her and tosses the hood from her face; the hard road bruises her feet, unaccustomed to other walks than those which lead from her chamber to the parlors of Framleigh; the darkness terrifies her with its impenetrable gloom. But still she progresses rapidly with no thought of retracing her steps.

A turn in the road brings to her sight the distant lights of Alderley. Once there, she thinks she will have no difficulty in finding the house she seeks. Any person on the street can direct her to No. 40 Balfour-street.

Hastening, almost at a run, she hears the town-clock ringing out the hour. Eight o'clock. She must make haste or it may, even then, be too late. Those in whose charge he is may become impatient, and she may not see him this night. And she feels that, come what may, she *must* speak with him to-night—*must* hear from his lips that he is innocent of her husband's blood.

The fields that lay on the outskirts of the town are crossed, and she has passed under the first of a long row of lamps which stretch in file before her. The half-dozen loiterers whom she meets before entering Balfour-street look wonderingly at the youthful figure, wrapped in the cloak and with the face concealed by the hood drawn over it, as it passes them rapidly, now in the light of the lamps, now in the shadow of the overhanging houses.

As she approaches Balfour-street, she sees, with a dreadful feeling upon her, that all wayfarers whom she meets are going in the same direction as she. Before her and behind her they hasten on, and she feels, with a sickness of heart, that they are all dwelling upon one subject, and that this subject is: Captain Vernon and the revelations that this day has brought with it.

She is in Balfour-street now. Groups stand at the corners speaking in whispers, or listening earnestly as some

one of them narrates that which seems to appal all whilst listening to him. And still the theme upon all tongues is: Captain Vernon and the tragedy at the Baron's Grave.

She understands plainly enough that the whole town is aware of what has transpired. She sees that men are gathering with an eager haste about the house which holds *him*, in the hands of the law and with a terrible charge hanging over him.

Two men are walking in front of her. She hears one say to the other, "He lives where you see the crowd standing. There's nothing, Bill, like the London detective, after all!" She brushes past them with a low moan, and stands at last before the house.

The crowd stood around, some talking and some listening. A portion of it was on the opposite side of the street, gathered near the door of Mr. Creech's shop, and those who composed it were seeking to look into the room in which the light was burning, and in which it was understood that Captain Vernon was. Shrinking from the rough contact of those who barred her passage, Mrs. Arncliffe made her way to the front door. Two men were standing there and guarding the entrance. One of them she had never seen before; the other was Blacker.

The old man was awaiting her; but he did not recognize her as she stood before him.

"Is it too late?" she whispered hurriedly. "Have they taken him away yet?"

Her hood had fallen back and had left a portion of her face exposed. It needed no second glance to convince the old man who it was who had addressed him. The sound of her voice was too dear to him for him ever to forget it. Opening the door quickly, he drew her in, out of the view of the staring crowd, and closed it after him. There was a look of anguish in his eye and a tremulous utterance in his voice as he spoke to her.

"Oh, Mrs. Arncliffe, I never supposed that you would have come thus, on foot and alone! I thought you would have come in your carriage, or I would have waited to accompany you!"

"No, no! I wished no one at Framleigh to know that I had left the house, and that is why I have walked. Oh, sir, tell me! is he guilty, is he unhappy?"

"He was present when Mr. Arncliffe was killed; but he is innocent of his death," returned the old man solemnly.

"Innocent!" she repeated, thankfully.

"Do you feel strong enough to see him now?" the old man said after a little while. "He has made inquiries for you."

"Yes, I will see him now," she returned. "I will see him now before it is too late." And then they went up the stairs together, she leaning upon the old man's arm.

A candle, burning dimly upon a table in the passage above, served to light the way to the door of Captain Vernon's room. Standing before it, with Mrs. Arncliffe beside him, Blacker knocked upon it gently and waited.

In the next moment it opened and Captain Vernon appeared upon the threshold, with the paleness intensified upon his face and with a shadow as of death resting upon it.

"Has she come?" he said eagerly to the old man. The opened door concealed Mrs. Arncliffe from his view, and he could not see her in the feeble, struggling light. Blacker did not answer his question in words, but he drew Mrs. Arncliffe toward him until she was exposed to Captain Vernon's gaze. Then he walked away quietly, leaving them together.

When the old man had gone, Mrs. Arncliffe looked up into Captain Vernon's face and spoke to him.

"Through the darkness of night, and alone, I have come to you, Captain Vernon. I have left that which should be

my only care, to come to *you*. Now what have you to tell me?"

He gazed at her with the old tenderness which she alone could invoke, and the fixed, lost stare left his eye for a moment as he took her cold hand in his and spoke.

"I know how little deserving I am," he murmured. "I know how I have wronged you. But if, in this moment, forgetting the past, you would be only a sister to me; if you would but call me 'Arthur'! My name, like my life, has been a false one. I am no longer Horace Vernon. I am Arthur—"

Her strength was failing her and he put his arm about her to support her. "Come into this room, Mrs. Arncliffe," he said. "Come and sit by the fire and listen to me forgivingly while I make a confession to you."

Weak as she was, she stood away from him and held to the door for support. "Captain Vernon," she said, "unless you swear to me by the memory of your dead mother that you are guiltless of my husband's death—that *you* did not kill him, I cannot speak with you."

"Then, Mrs. Arncliffe, I swear to you by the memory of my mother that your husband's death was an accident. There is one now before the coroner who is testifying to my unfortunate participation in that calamity. You shall know the truth shortly, Mrs. Arncliffe."

He spoke solemnly, and as she looked upon his pallid face she felt that her love for him was stronger than it had ever been before. Stronger, perchance, for the great barrier that separated them now! Stronger, because he had none, in this moment, to care for him! Driven to the wall by the power of the law, with the hands of all men against him, should she, too, abandon him! No. Not until that law had done its worst, would she, believing him innocent, desert him!

"I believe you to be guiltless of my husband's death," she said. "I will go with you now and listen to you." He took her yielding hand in his, and then they went into the room.

Sitting before the fire in the chair which he had so often occupied; looking, as he had so often done, upon the portrait above the mantelpiece; she waited until he should speak and commence that confession which should be a reparation for what he had done to her injury.

"Bertha," he commenced,—"your anger will not fall upon me if I call you by that name in this hour?"

"I am to be a sister to you. You may call me Bertha, now," she murmured.

"When you married your late husband," he went on, "did you know the story of your life?"

"I did not know every circumstance connected with it; but Mr. Arncliffe did. What more can you tell me of it?"

"Listen to me patiently for a while. Did you ever hear the name of Tyrrel mentioned at Mrs. Archibald's as connected with the history of your family?"

"Never at my home. I have heard of it of late, when my adopted mother wrote to me and told me of those things in my early life of which I had before been ignorant. Why do you ask if I have ever heard the name of Tyrrel?"

"Because that is my name. Because that name is involved with your early life. Because when I bore that name I knew you as a little girl. Because, bearing that name, I wronged you and yours!"

She looked at him eagerly. "Your name is Tyrrel?" she said.

"Yes. The disguise with which I sought to conceal my identity—why I sought this concealment you shall know directly—has been torn from me by this night's work. To

morrow the whole town will be ringing with the news of the apprehension of the fugitive, Arthur Tyrrel. I am he!" With something of his old frown struggling for the mastery, with a revival of that old passionate nature which had seemingly passed away from him, he stared upon her as if awaiting her answer. That answer came in a passionate burst of tears.

"If you are Arthur Tyrrel you must have known my father! You must know whether he be alive, or not! If you ever loved me, and you have told me that you loved me, do not let me die without some knowledge of him!"

"I will not say now, Bertha, how I have loved you! I will not say through what hopeless days and nights, since my return here to Alderley, I have thought of you and cursed the destiny which has held us apart. I will not say that I became reckless of my life when I knew that I had aroused your anger! You see me here, Bertha, with the toils around me, because I did not care to escape my pursuers, knowing that I had wronged you. Oh, Bertha, this is my expiation! Let my long anguish plead for me, and forgive me before you go from me—forgive me for the avowal of that love to you—forgive me that, in the course of my unhappy, misdirected life, I have been the enemy of your happiness from your childhood to this hour!"

He rose suddenly and, before she was aware of his purpose, he was kneeling at her feet. In that position of humility; in that visible confession of his abnegation of all those passions and of all that arrogance that had once made him dangerous, he went on speaking rapidly.

"When I came here a month ago from Paris, I came with what may prove a felon's doom overhanging me, and with an evil thought in my heart. That evil thought was directed against you!"

"Against me?"

"Yes. Listen now while I make my confession, and, when I shall have finished, let me hear you say, 'I forgive you.' When I came to this place from Paris, I came with the knowledge of the whole history of your life and of your father's existence. In that city, a fugitive from the law who did not dare to proclaim himself for fear of the watchful detectives, I received the information of your marriage with Mr. Arncliffe and I resolved to seek you both. From the time when I left England, ten years ago, to the present day, your history, month by month and year by year, has been known to me. In coming here a month ago, I had determined, in the belief that Mr. Arncliffe was ignorant of the truth, to go to you and to say, 'You, Mrs. Arncliffe, aid me with your husband, and you, Mr. Arncliffe, assist me with your influence, or I shall make the world aware of what I know.' I thought that, in thus speaking, I would bend Mr. Arncliffe's proud nature to my purposes and that he would give me his influence in exchange for the knowledge that was mine. I thought that, in his pride, he would do this rather than that his class should know that the father of the woman whom he had chosen to bear his name was an obscure man, who had hastened the death of his wife by his wilful neglect!"

Mrs. Arncliffe interrupted him through her tears. "Mr. Arncliffe knew the story of my life when he married me. He knew all that you could have told me."

"No, he did not know all; but I will come to that presently. When I went to Framleigh-Place, on the day of our first meeting, and when I saw you, I loved you. There was no pride about you, there was no scorn of any human thing in your manner, there was none of the haughtiness that I had thought to find in you, there was only goodness and gentleness about you; and I loved you, Bartha!"

Listening to him, she made no protest against his words. There were no obligations resting upon her, now, like those which, the day before, had steeled her heart against him. She saw him at her feet, in the crowning moment of his unhappy life, and she felt that she could not add to his desolation by rebuking him, or strengthen his self-reproach by word or act of hers.

"When I saw you," he went on, "I could trace no likeness in you to the little girl with whom my days of childhood were passed, in that time, Bertha, before your mother had left your father's roof to seek shelter with a stranger. You cannot remember me as your playfellow in those days?"

"No, I remember nothing of those days."

"I was innocent then, Bertha. But when that separation occurred between your father and your mother, and when, in the course of time, my father and mother died, I was left to your father's charge. I do not know how it commenced; but as I grew older I discovered that your father yielded to me. In those days my nature had changed. The first evidences of passion which had sorrowed my poor mother so often had grown into an unruly, wilful nature which would not brook control and which has never left me since. In those days, too, your father, truly repentant then, I am sure, wrote to your mother imploring her to return to him."

"And why did not he answer my mother's letter?" she murmured.

"Because *I* was there to dissuade him. *I*, the evil genius of all with whom I have ever been associated. I had a purpose in view, and, in order that that purpose should be fulfilled, it was necessary that you should not again return under his control. That purpose was accomplished when you married Mr. Arneliffe. Even in those

days, when I was but a youth, I speculated in your future. By remaining with Mrs. Archibald, I considered that you would make a better marriage, in time, than you could ever make if you should be with your father; and I thought, even then, that some day, when this world's fortunes were in your lap, I would come to you and demand your friendly offices as a return for the secret of your father's existence."

When Captain Vernon—for so let him be to the end—had spoken these words, Mrs. Arncliffe said, solemnly, "Of all the wrong acts of your life, Arthur Tyrrel, that was the worst, for it killed my poor mother."

"I know that you must hate me, Bertha, and your hate is more to me than all the harm that could come to me through the world's malice. I know that you will never forgive the wrong that I have done you; but if penitence can atone for wrong I have atoned for this. I have asked you to come to me in order that I might make reparation, before we are parted forever, and I must go on with my confession. When we heard of your mother's death, your father never ceased reproaching himself for having hastened it. By this time he was thoroughly subject to my will. And so, when he spoke of going to Mrs. Archibald's and reclaiming you, I taunted him with his neglect of your mother and said to him that by that desertion he had forfeited his right to his daughter. I told him that you had been taught to hate him and that he did not deserve a daughter's love. As was usual, I conquered, and so it was that he never sought you at Mrs. Archibald's."

"My poor father! He did not, then, remain away from my mother, or desert me, willingly!"

"When I grew up," Captain Vernon went on, "I bought a commission in the army and left England for Calcutta. I had squandered whatever of fortune my father had left to me, until only this old house remained; but this house I

could not part with, for I was born here. Before I left I told your father that, if he should hear of my death, he could follow his will in the matter of making himself known to you; but that, otherwise, he was to wait, either until I had sanctioned his action, or until I should declare him to you. He obeyed me in that, as in everything, and it was during my life in the East that I did that which has since placed me under the ban."

And then in a rapid, wandering story, half self-reproachful and half directed against society, he confessed to Mrs. Arncliffe what he had told Mr. Arncliffe at the Baron's Grave and to which the tobaccoist had already testified. How the offence, from the consequences of which he had sought safety in flight, had been forced upon him. How he had managed to escape from Calcutta through the agency of Monsieur Raphael Saint Elme, and how thereafter he had led a dog's life for weeks in Paris, and how, in a moment of debauch, Monsieur Raphael had wrung from him the secret of her parentage. How the foreigner had held the knowledge of his escape in constant menace over him, and had influenced him in doing those things which he would never have done otherwise. How, leading this wretched life in Paris, constantly in fear of his pursuers, and constantly with that sense of being hunted down, he had read of her marriage with Mr. Arncliffe, and his old dream, almost forgotten then, had returned to him, and how he had made Monsieur Raphael aware of his intention to return to England and of the reason that caused him to return. How, returning with the hope of securing Mr. Arncliffe's influence in his behalf, he had seen her and had loved her. How she was the only woman whom he had ever loved, and the only woman who could have preserved him from all taint of evil. How, in loving her, he had become penitent and had forgotten his wrong life in the one

thought that he would never dwell apart from her; that he might be tracked to Alderley and hunted down, but that, of his own free will, he would never leave her presence more. How the foreigner had followed him to Alderley, and had demanded that the agreement should be fulfilled and that she should be approached on the subject of giving money for the secret of her life. How they had met and parted—the foreigner with malice in his heart—and how Monsieur Raphael had gone back to London, and, in answer to an advertisement in the *Times* offering a reward for the apprehension of one Arthur Tyrrel, a fugitive, had sought the authorities and had betrayed him. How, after his departure from Eden Lodge, when he had so wronged her by declaring his love to her, he had arrived in Alderley and had left his horse at the stables and, feeling in no humor to sit alone in his room, had walked out to look at the house which was sacred to the memory of her. How, passing the lodge he had overheard the gate-keeper saying to a friend, sitting with him in the lodge, that Mr. Arncliffe had arrived from London and had gone down to the Baron's Grave. How, when he heard that, he determined to seek Mr. Arncliffe and confide to him his history and implore him, for Christian charity, to use his influence in helping him to regain an honest name by having the indictment against him withdrawn, and his escape pardoned him, when he should, as he had intended to do, surrender himself for trial. How, because he *was* a fugitive, and because he had crossed the threshold of Framleigh, Mr. Arncliffe had reviled him and had threatened to strike him with his whip, and how, in a fatal yielding to his passionate nature, he had attempted to compel Mr. Arncliffe's attention. How Mr. Arncliffe's horse had taken fright and, in spite of all efforts to restrain him, had fallen over into the Baron's Grave. How, turning to flee from the fatal spot, he had overtaken the for-

eigner, who had followed him there, and how he had seized him, demanding why he had followed him. How, then, the foreigner had stabbed him with a knife and had broken away from him and, being ignorant of the locality, had fallen, like Mr. Arncliffe, into the deadly pit. How, then, he had fled back to the house in Balfour-street, and how those who had been instructed by Monsieur Raphael had come upon him, from London, in his old home, and had placed the authorities of Alderley upon his track. How, in this fulfilment of his destiny, he had had no desire to escape his doom—the more because he believed that she hated him for what he had done. And how, finally, he had sent for her to tell her all this, and to hear her say to him that he was forgiven, and that, in going forth from her never to see her more, she might, in her goodness, when others deserted him, pray for him and bless him, if not for his own sake, for the sake of that dead mother of his who was not there to soothe him in his affliction.

Mrs. Arncliffe was bending over him when he ceased speaking, and her tears were washing out his evil, in her heart, and were testifying to her forgiveness. There, in the solitude of that chamber, alone with him whose story of misfortune, darkened as it was with wrong against her, had endeared him to her heart, she fought against the confession of her love with a vehement earnestness. But for the memory of that unhoused mortality lying in state in the drawing-room at Framleigh, and protesting in its solemn stillness against the wrong, she might have yielded; but as she had once conquered the impulse she conquered it again, and when she spoke it was to speak those consoling words that a sister might have spoken.

“Not alone for your dead mother’s sake will I bless you, Arthur! Not alone for her sake will I forgive you; but I accord *that* forgiveness from my own heart. It was not

your hand that caused Mr. Arncliffe's death, because you tried to save him. You did not doom me to widowhood with guilty hand; and though the world desert you I will not. And when you tell them what you have told me, they will acquit you of crime, and you may yet—be happy."

He lifted his head to look at her. For a moment, in those eyes upturned to hers, she read the love he had expressed in words. Then he bent his head upon his knee.

"Too late," he murmured; "too late to change what is to be! I expiate a life of error now, and even *your* love could not save me. But could I have known that you would have forgiven me, wretch that I am, I would have preserved my worthless life by flight. But I thought that you, more than all others, would turn against me, and I resolved to meet my fate here, where I was born!"

The quiet of the old house was unbroken by movement of theirs. He, still in that humble, penitent posture, hiding his face from her; she, gazing down upon him silently and with the tears still falling from her eyes. At last, he went on speaking. He thought of the passing moments. The men without would call for him soon, and his reparation was not yet complete.

"There is one thing else, Bertha," he said, "and then I shall have finished my confession. Let me tell you of your father."

In her passionate surrender of thought and memory to the man who was addressing her, she had forgotten that.

"If you are to tell me of my father," she said eagerly, "do not tell me that he is alive and degraded. It were better to know that he is dead."

"He is not dead, Bertha. He is alive, but not degraded.

I can at least give him to you in return for your forgiveness. Not, as of old, unworthy of your love; but repentant, and waiting to be received to your arms."

Even as he spoke, her head drooped upon her bosom and consciousness left her. Standing upon the threshold of the first knowledge of her father, she yielded to the weakness that beset her and would have fallen but for the strong arm that supported her. With her head lying upon his shoulder and her fair hair mingling with the dark brown of his; with her face so close to him that her measured breathing fanned his cheek; with the throbbing of her heart palpable to his sense of feeling; he made no movement to break her calm repose. He gazed at her pale face with a yearning intensity of love and drew her nearer to him.

Then from her lips came a murmuring sound. She was speaking in her absence of consciousness, and with speech came a betrayal of the secret so long and so faithfully kept.

"They shall not take you away from me," she murmured. "It is too soon to part from you."

Her hand crept up to his shoulder and rested there in a loving embrace. With a sudden understanding of her love for him breaking upon his mind, Captain Vernon brushed back the straying hair from her forehead and kissed her. And so, with her arm thrown protectingly around him as if in that action she would shield him from his persecutors, and in her unconsciousness of her discovered secret, she lay for a little while upon the breast of him to whom her love was given.

Oh, strange conjunction! that had thus opened the door for love to escape! Oh, strange destiny! that had seen the flowers of passion springing to blossom upon the verge of a grave!

When the seconds had passed into minutes, Captain Vernon lifted Mrs. Arncliffe from her chair and walked to the door with her unconscious form in his arms. He opened the door and there, standing near it, was the old man whose sorrows were finally to be forgotten in a daughter's love and blessings.

Captain Vernon led him in and closed the door after him. "Blacker," he said, "I have not yet told Bertha that you are her father. She fainted, as you see her here, just as I was about to tell her of you. But she knows that her father is alive and waiting to make himself known. When you leave this room with her you must inform her of the truth."

"Will she forgive me, Arthur?"

"Yes, yes. She is all forgiveness. She is all goodness. She has forgiven even me, Blacker. Go now and tell Masters that I shall be ready for him in a half-hour. I have that time left me yet by our agreement. In that time I must make my last preparations before leaving this house. Blacker, I feel more cheerful than I have felt for a month. I am innocent, and something tells me that the man who followed me and Monsieur Raphael will clear me from the suspicion of murder. If it should be so, I will accept the good as I would have accepted the ill. I would then have a purpose in life—oh, so noble, so good, so peace-giving a purpose! I shall meet my enemies with a light heart. But I am detaining you here. Tell Masters to come when the half-hour is over and call me."

There was a cheerful alacrity in his tone that struck the old man pleasantly. He had not spoken so cheerfully since his return to Alderley.

"I think your innocence will be vindicated, Arthur. Your friends can secure your pardon for the other offence," returned the old man. And then, with a wistful look at

his daughter, he left the room on his mission to the detective.

When the door closed upon him, Captain Vernon, holding Mrs. Arncliffe in his strong embrace, murmured, "Bertha, you must leave me now. Best beloved, we must part." But no answer came from her. The pallor was still upon her face and she breathed faintly through her parted lips. Again he kissed her and drew her to him more closely. Unconscious of the separation between them she lay in a trance until the door opened and the old man appeared with the answer to Captain Vernon's message.

"Bertha has not yet recovered; but it is better so," said Captain Vernon, consigning her to her father's arms. "What did Masters say?"

"He said that you could have the half-hour, Arthur."

"Tell him that I thank him." And then, with a last look at the calm face resting upon the old man's shoulder, he laid his hand lightly upon her forehead, and added, "Blacker, when I go from you—to whatever fate it may prove—remember only the good that may be in my nature. Forget my iniquities and think of me as a remorseful, unhappy man. Above all things be kind to poor Bertha, and—God bless you and her, Blacker."

In the next instant he had closed the door and the old man was bearing Mrs. Arncliffe to the guest's chamber, where, in the pauses of her ministrations, Mary Agnes, amid her tears, became aware of who was the Beauty whom Captain Vernon had kissed to life and to whom his love was given.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CAPTAIN VERNON PASSES UNDER THE LION'S HEAD, AND THE HOUSE IN BALFOUR-STREET BECOMES TENANTLESS.

IN the half-hour allotted to Captain Vernon a strange stillness fell upon the house in Balfour-street. The detective sat before the fire in Blacker's room waiting for the time that had been granted Captain Vernon to elapse—waiting until the clock should ring the hour of ten, and speaking in low tones of him and his probable future. In the guest's chamber the old man sat beside the bed that held the form of Mrs. Arncliffe, still dead to the parting that had occurred between her and Captain Vernon—dead, in the counterfeit death that had come to her, to the words of her father, holding her hand in his and weeping by her pillow.

In the street in front of the old house, the crowd, augmented now to hundreds, swayed and jostled at each new accession to its numbers. There was talking, but not in a loud tone, around the front door and under the lion's head. Watts, the policeman, elevated into an object of respectful attention as being the repository of the dread secret within, was at a loss to answer one-half the questions put to him. The rapid writers were there and the foreign looking gentlemen were there, and they were pressing close up to the door, and pleading, in virtue of their office, to be admitted. But Watts, careful of the injunctions of Masters to "keep the gangway clear below," was obdurate in his refusal to admit any one—not even the rapid writers and the foreign

looking gentlemen; and so the crowd stood around, now pressing forward, now falling back at the menace of the policeman's truncheon, and all the time staring, over each other's shoulders, with open mouths and eyes agape, at the dusty door and at the watchful guardian who stood near it deaf to all entreaties and remorseless in his unbending refusal to open it.

Across the way, the Mandarin in front of the tobacconist's door was crowned with a small boy who had been raised to that elevation by the combined strength of several anxious inquirers, who were standing below and looking up at him and asking him if he could see into the old house, and, if so, what could he see? To this question the boy answered that he thought he could see something. On inquiry, it appeared that what he saw looked like a man's face. On further inquiry, it appeared that it looked like a man's face, but the hair on the head looked like a woman's hair. Then it was shrewdly surmised (by those below) that what the boy, sitting astride of the Mandarin, saw, was the face of the cloaked woman who had entered the old house an hour before, which woman, it appeared, from popular rumor floating around, was the wife, or the mother, or the sister, or a female acquaintance—rumor was not certain which—of the unhappy man within.

Then the current of opinion was changed by the boy's remarking (with his neck stretched and his legs clinging convulsively to the shoulders of the Mandarin for support) that he didn't believe that what he saw was a man's face or a woman's face, but that, if he could only get a little higher, he could tell what it was. Then why didn't he get a little higher? Or, if he couldn't get any higher, why didn't he come down and let somebody get up there who could? came in the shape of a protest from the crowd.

Then there came an adjuration to those below (from the

boy) to hold on, will you? for he had a good sight of the thing—whatever it was—now. And finally it appeared that what the boy saw was neither a man nor a woman, but something that might stand for a woman—a picture above the mantelpiece.

Thus, to the waiting crowd without, passed half the time that Captain Vernon had asked for. It was already (as appeared by the policeman's watch) a quarter to ten o'clock. How stood it with those within the old house?

Matters were not much changed from the condition in which they had been when Captain Vernon had closed the door. In Blacker's room the detective still sat with his companion and they still spoke of Captain Vernon's case, and both agreed that appearances set dead against him. In the guest's chamber there was whispering, too. There was a low murmur of voices, and passionate weeping, as Mrs. Arncliffe, recovered now and made aware of her relationship to the old man, told her father of her love for Captain Vernon and how, in that dark moment, she loved him still. There was a mingling of tears as the old man spoke to her, in return, of how he had suffered in the long years that had intervened since that day when her mother—his wife whom he had sworn to love and cherish—had fled from him. And in that moment, with his head pillowed upon her bosom, he rejoiced that God had spared him and her to witness this meeting, wherein the atonement was made in tears and the forgiveness that he had yearned for was accorded him.

But above all that dwelt on their tongues rested the sense of what had come to the man who had been, for so many years, the obstacle to their union. In Mrs. Arncliffe's mind dwelt an awful despair of what the future held in store for him. A greater-despair than had come to her

when the announcement was made to her that her husband was slowly dying and that she should seek him. For, in her great love, she felt that she would rather die with him knowing him to be innocent—forgotten as he would be forgotten, or execrated as he, perchance, would be execrated—than live to see him go forth to meet his judgment with all men's curses upon him.

Ten o'clock! Ringing through the night, slowly, and with a solemn peal, came the warning to the expectant ears that were waiting for it. The old man, bending down and kissing the pale cheek lying wearily upon the pillow, spoke to his daughter.

"Bertha," he said, "I am going to speak to Arthur and tell him how happy he has made me in restoring you to me. I am going to him to tell him to be of good cheer and to look hopefully upon the future. You had better not see him now. You had better wait until you feel calmer, Bertha."

The blue eyes looked tearfully into his. "I will never be calmer than I am now, father. I will never be happy again," she murmured.

"Will you remain here, Bertha?"

"If you wish it, father—yes. But when he goes through the passage, I must see him pass. I must stand by the door and see him once more before those men in there take him away from me. Hereafter, you may tell him what I have told you to-night. Tell him that my words to him, through you, were, that much fidelity will deserve much recompense; that much misfortune should meet with much compensation, and that in all well-doing he must be earnest and true and patient."

In the shadow of that uncertain light she saw him pass from his door to the head of the stairs. Behind him walked

the detective and his comrade; by his side, her father. For a moment the strong step faltered, the iron nature melted, the fearless eye drooped as he stood at the head of the stairway and glanced at the venerable walls which had sheltered his mother and within which he had played as a sinless child. Giving every sense to the observance of him, she caught his parting words.

"The house, Blacker, in which I was born! And to leave it as I am leaving it now!"

But as his eye fell upon her, standing in the doorway, with her finger pointed upward, the bitter passionate mood passed from his face and he bent his head in reverence. For in her unspoken exhortation he read the story of his life's mistake. And even in that moment a loud cheer from the street below, and the utterances of clamorous voices mingling in unison, proclaimed the arrival of the tidings that the man whom all had suspected was innocent. For an instant, taking in its meaning, he held his hand to his forehead and fixed his gaze upon the face of the woman who had taught his hardened heart patience and humility; and then he went down the stairway to pass, under the lion's head, from the darkness and decay of the old house, into the bustle and stir of the lighted street, on his way to expiation.

And, as he had gone out of the darkness of the house in Balfour-street, so from that day forth did he go out of the darkness of his old, doubting life. A man in whose behalf many generous hands were outstretched to succor; upon whose ear, given at last to heed them, the words of sympathy and good cheer fell not barrenly and not without noble fruitage; the law which he had once reviled, and from which he had fled in wrath and with hatred of his kind, gave

him back to the world untainted by the stigma of crime. And when, finally, an altered man and a man of excellent repute among his fellows—having proven himself earnest and true and patient in well-doing—he sought, after many years, the recompense for his fidelity and the compensation for his misfortunes, these were given to him in the hour when Bertha became his wife.

THE END.





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